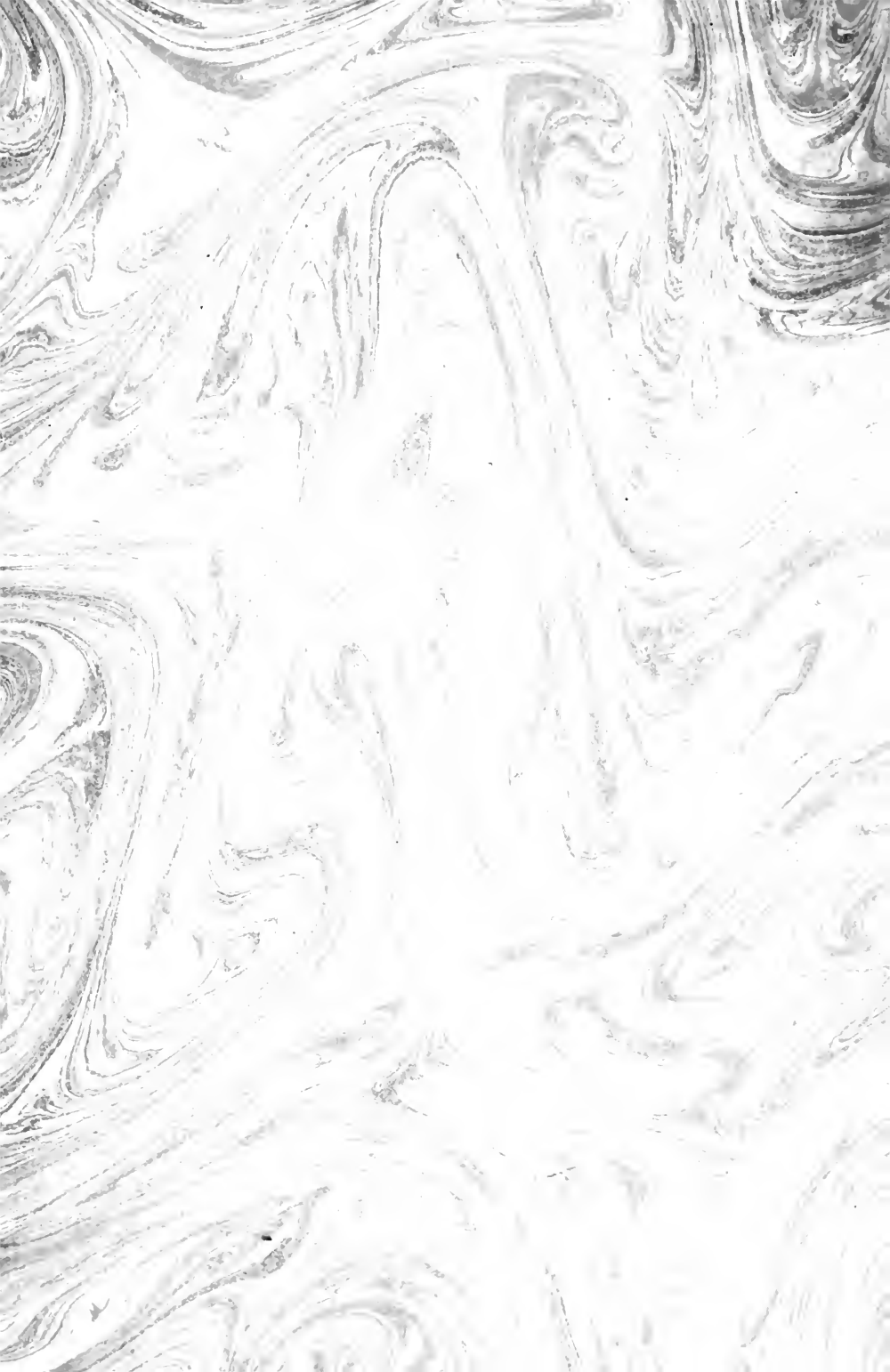


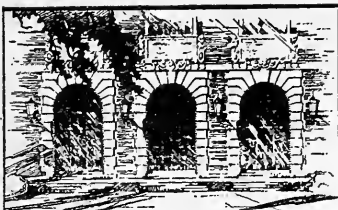


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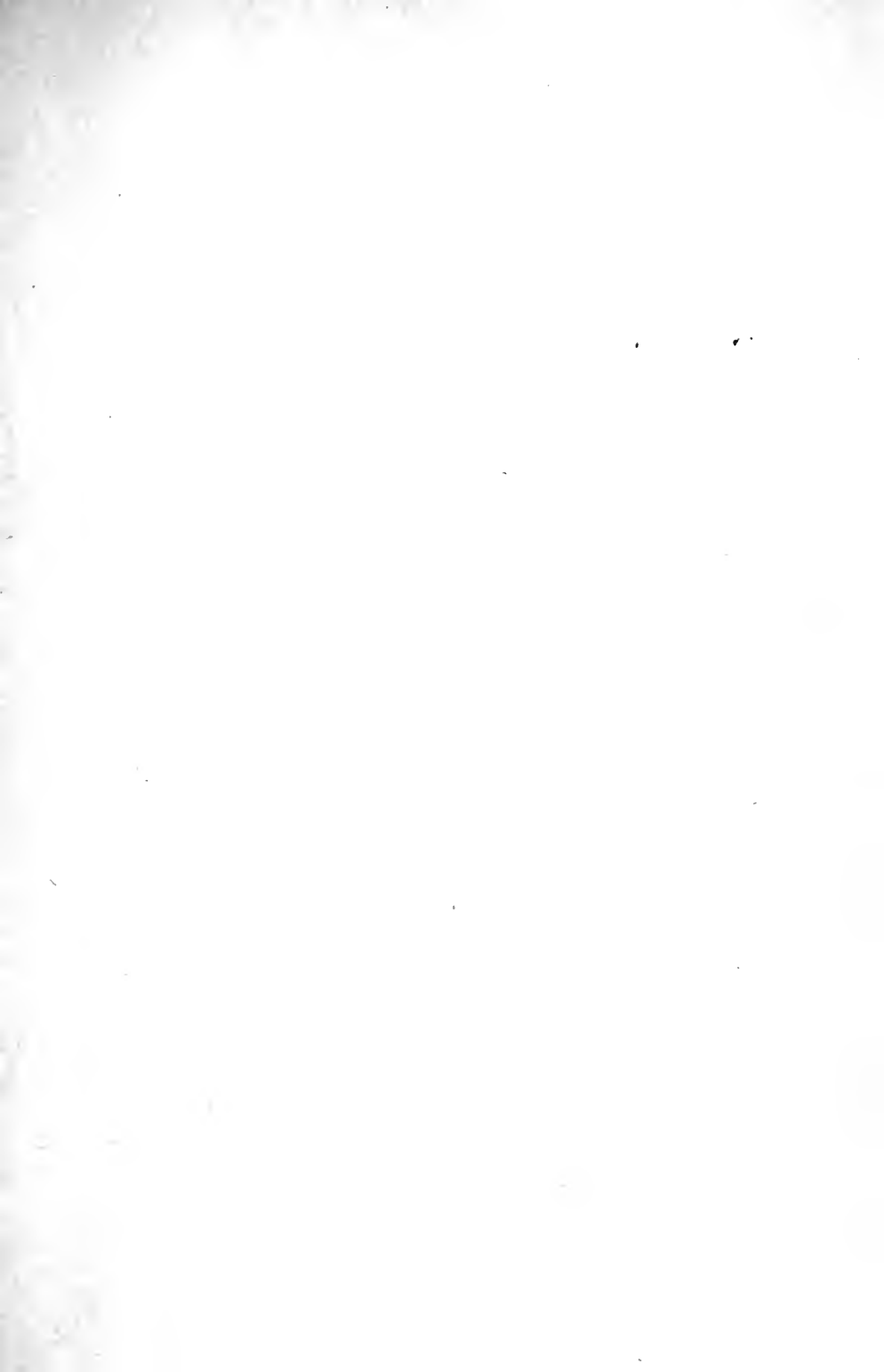


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UNDER THE
GREENWOOD TREE

A

Rural Painting of the Dutch School.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'DESPERATE REMEDIES.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1872.

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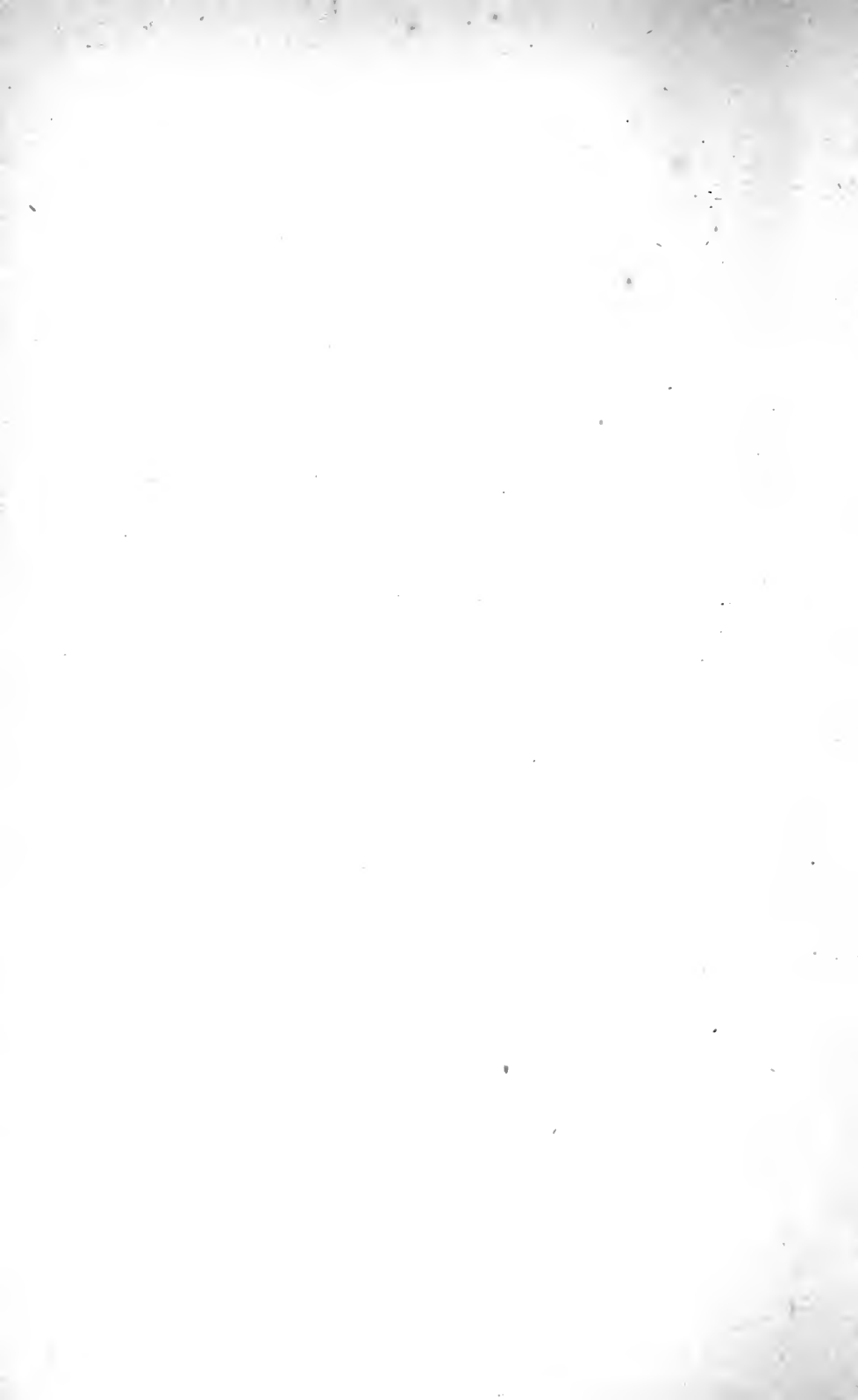
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PART II.

SPRING (*continued*).



CHAPTER VII.

DICK MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL.

THE effect of Geoffrey's incidental allusions to Mr. Shinar was to restrain a considerable quantity of spontaneous chat that would otherwise have burst from young Dewy along the drive homeward. And a certain remark he had hazarded to her, in rather too blunt and eager a manner, kept the young lady herself even more silent than Dick. On both sides there was an unwillingness to talk on any but the most trivial subjects, and their sentences rarely took a larger form than could be expressed in two or three words.

Owing to Fancy being later in the day than she had promised, the charwoman had given up expecting her; whereupon Dick could do no less than stay and see her comfortably tided through the disagreeable time of entering and establishing herself in an empty house after an absence of a week. The additional furniture and utensils that had been brought (a canary and cage among the rest) were taken out of the vehicle, and the horse was unharnessed and put in the school plot, where there was some tender grass. Dick lighted the fire; and activity began to loosen their tongues a little.

‘There!’ said Fancy, ‘we forgot to bring the fire-irons!’

She had originally found in her house, to bear out the expression ‘nearly furnished’ which the school-manager had used in his letter to her, a table, three chairs,

a fender, and a piece of carpet. This 'nearly' had been supplemented hitherto by a kind friend, who had lent her fire-irons and crockery until she should fetch some from home.

Dick attended to the young lady's fire, using his whip-handle for a poker till it was spoilt, and then flourishing a hurdle stick for the remainder of the time.

'The kettle boils, now you shall have a cup of tea,' said Fancy, diving into the hamper she had brought.

'Thank you,' said Dick, whose drive had made him ready for a cup, especially in her company.

'Well, here's only one cup and saucer, as I breathe! Whatever could mother be thinking about. Do you mind making shift, Mr. Dewy?'

'Not at all, Miss Day,' said that civil person.

‘ And only having a cup by itself? or a saucer by itself?’

‘ Don’t mind in the least.’

‘ Which do you mean by that?’

‘ I mean the cup, if you like the saucer.’

‘ And the saucer, if I like the cup?’

‘ Exactly, Miss Day.’

‘ Thank you, Mr. Dewy, for I like the cup decidedly. Stop a minute; there are no spoons now!’ She dived into the hamper again, and at the end of two or three minutes looked up and said, ‘ I suppose you don’t mind if I can’t find a spoon?’

‘ Not at all,’ said the agreeable Richard.

‘ The fact is, the spoons have slipped down somewhere; right under the other things. O yes, here’s one, and only one. You would rather have one than not, I suppose, Mr. Dewy?’

‘ Rather not. I never did care much about spoons.’

‘Then I’ll have it. I do care about them. You must stir up your tea with a knife. Would you mind lifting the kettle off, that it may not boil dry?’

Dick leaped to the fireplace, and earnestly removed the kettle.

‘There! you did it so wildly that you have made your hand black. We always use kettle-holders; didn’t you learn housewifery as far as that, Mr. Dewy? Well, never mind the soot on your hand. Come here. I am going to rinse mine, too.’

They went to a basin she had placed in the back room. ‘This is the only basin I have,’ she said. ‘Turn up your sleeves, and by that time my hands will be washed, and you can come.’

Her hands were in the water now. ‘O, how vexing!’ she exclaimed. ‘There’s not a drop of water left for you, unless you draw it, and the well is I don’t know how many

feet deep; all that was in the pitcher I used for the kettle and this basin. Do you mind dipping the tips of your fingers in the same?’

‘Not at all. And to save time I won’t wait till you have done, if you have no objection?’

Thereupon he plunged in his hands, and they paddled together. It being the first time in his life that he had touched female fingers under water, Dick duly registered the sensation as rather a nice one.

‘Really, I hardly know which are my own hands and which are yours, they have got so mixed up together,’ she said, withdrawing her own very suddenly.

‘It doesn’t matter at all,’ said Dick, ‘at least as far as I am concerned.’

‘There! no towel! Whoever thinks of a towel till the hands are wet?’

‘Nobody.’

“Nobody.” How very dull it is when people are so friendly! Come here, Mr. Dewy. Now do you think you could lift the lid of that box with your elbow, and then, with something or other, take out a towel you will find under the clean clothes. Be *sure* don't touch any of them with your wet hands, for the things at the top are all Starched and Ironed.'

Dick managed, by the aid of a knife and fork, to extract a towel from under a muslin dress without wetting the latter ; and for a moment he ventured to assume a tone of criticism.

'I fear for that dress,' he said, as they wiped their hands together.

'What?' said Miss Day, looking into the box at the dress alluded to. 'O, I know what you mean—that the vicar will never let me wear muslin?'

'Yes.'

‘Well, I know it is condemned by all parties in the church as flaunting, and unfit for common wear for girls below clerical condition; but we’ll see.’

‘In the interest of the church, I hope you don’t speak seriously.’

‘Yes, I do; but we’ll see.’ There was a comely determination on her lip, very pleasant to a beholder who was neither bishop, priest, nor deacon. ‘I think I can manage any vicar’s views about me if he’s under forty.’

Dick rather wished she had never thought of managing vicars.

‘I certainly shall be glad to get some of your delicious tea,’ he said in rather a free way, yet modestly, as became one in a position between that of visitor and inmate, and looking wistfully at his lonely saucer.

‘So shall I. Now is there anything else we want, Mr. Dewy?’

‘I really think there’s nothing else, Miss Day.’

She prepared to sit down, looking musingly out of the window at Smart’s enjoyment of the rich grass. ‘Nobody seems to care about me,’ she murmured, with large lost eyes fixed upon the sky beyond Smart.

‘Perhaps Mr. Shinar does,’ said Dick, in the tone of a slightly injured man.

‘Yes, I forgot—he does, I know.’ Dick precipitately regretted that he had suggested Shinar, since it had produced such a miserable result as this.

‘I’ll warrant you’ll care for somebody very much indeed another day, won’t you, Mr. Dewy?’ she continued, looking very feelingly into the mathematical centre of his eyes.

‘Ah, I’ll warrant I shall!’ said Dick, feelingly too, and looking back into her

dark pupils, whereupon they were turned aside.

‘I meant,’ she went on, preventing him from speaking just as he was going to narrate a forcible story about his feelings; ‘I meant that nobody comes to see if I have returned—not even the vicar.’

‘If you want to see him, I’ll call at the vicarage directly we have had some tea.’

‘No, no! Don’t let him come down here, whatever you do, whilst I am in such a state of disarrangement. Vicars look so miserable and awkward when one’s house is in a muddle; walking about, and making impossible suggestions in quaint academic phrases till your flesh creeps and you wish them dead. Do you take sugar?’

Mr. Maybold was at this instant seen coming up the path.

‘There! That’s he coming! How I wish you were not here!—that is, how awk-

ward—dear, dear!’ she exclaimed, with a quick ascent of blood to her face, and irritated with Dick rather than the vicar, as it seemed.

‘Pray don’t be alarmed on my account, Miss Day—good-afternoon!’ said Dick in a huff, putting on his hat, and leaving the room hastily by the back-door.

The horse was put in, and on mounting the shafts to start, he saw through the window the vicar standing upon some books piled in a chair, and driving a nail into the wall; Fancy, with a demure glance, holding the canary-cage up to him, as if she had never in her life thought of anything but vicars and canaries.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK MEETS HIS FATHER.

FOR several minutes Dick drove along homeward, with the inward eye of reflection so anxiously set on his passages at arms with Fancy, that the road and scenery were as a thin mist over the real pictures of his mind. Was she a coquette? The balance between the evidence that she did love him and that she did not was so nicely struck, that his opinion had no stability. She had let him put his hand upon hers; she had allowed her eyes to drop plump into the depths of his—his into hers—three or four

times ; her manner had been very free with regard to the basin and towel ; she had appeared vexed at the mention of Shinar. On the other hand, she had driven him about the house like a quiet dog or cat, said Shinar cared for her, and seemed anxious that Mr. Maybold should do the same.

Thinking thus as he turned the corner at Mellstock Cross, sitting on the front board of the spring cart—his legs on the outside, and his whole frame jiggling up and down like a candle-flame to the time of Smart's trotting—who should he see coming down the hill but his father in the light wagon, quivering up and down on a smaller scale of shakes, those merely caused by the stones in the road. They were soon crossing each other's front.

‘ Weh-hey ! ’ said the tranter to Smiler.

‘ Weh-hey ! ’ said Dick to Smart, in an echo of the same voice.

‘Th’st hauled her over, I suppose?’ Reuben inquired peaceably.

‘Yes,’ said Dick, with such a clinching period at the end that it seemed he was never going to add another word. Smiler, thinking this the close of the conversation, prepared to move on.

‘Weh-heh!’ said the tranter. ‘I tell thee what it is, Dick. That there maid is taking up thy thoughts more than’s good for thee, my sonny. Thou’rt never happy now unless th’rt making thyself miserable about her in one way or another.’

‘I don’t know about that, father,’ said Dick rather stupidly.

‘But I do—Wey, Smiler!—’Od rot the women, ’tis nothing else wi’ ’em nowadays but getting young men and leading ’em astray.’

‘Pooh, father! you just repeat what all the common world says; that’s all you do.’

‘The world’s a very sensible feller on things in jeneral, Dick; a very sensible party indeed.’

Dick looked into the distance at a vast expanse of mortgaged estate. ‘I wish I was as rich as a lord when he’s as poor as a crow,’ he murmured; ‘I’d soon ask Fancy something.’

‘I wish so too, wi’ all my heart, sonny; that I do. Well, mind what beest about, that’s all.’

Smart moved on a step or two. ‘Supposing now, father—We-hey, Smart!—I did think a little about her, and I had a chance, which I ha’n’t; don’t you think she’s a very good sort of—of—one?’

‘Ay, good; she’s good enough. When you’ve made up your mind to marry, take the first respectable body that comes to hand—she’s as good as any other; they be all alike in the groundwork: ’tis only in the

flourishes there's a difference. She's good enough; but I can't see what the nation a young feller like you—wi' a comfortable house and home, and father and mother to take care o' thee, and who sent 'ee to a school so good that 'twas hardly fair to the other children—should want to go hollering after a young woman for, when she's quietly making a husband in her pocket, and not troubled by chick nor chiel, to make a poverty-stric' wife and family of her, and neither hat, cap, wig, nor waistcoat to set 'em up wi': be drowned if I can see it, and that's the long and short o't, my sonny!

Dick looked at Smart's ears, then up the hill; but no reason was suggested by any object that met his gaze.

'For about the same reason that you did, father, I suppose.'

'Dang it, my sonny, thou'st got me there!' and the tranter gave vent to a grim

admiration, with the mien of a man who was too magnanimous not to appreciate a slight rap on the knuckles, even if they were his own.

‘Whether or no,’ said Dick, ‘I asked her a thing going along the road.’

‘Come to that, is it? Turk! won’t thy mother be in a taking! Well, she’s ready, I don’t doubt?’

‘I didn’t ask her anything about having me; and if you’ll let me speak, I’ll tell ’ee what I want to know. I just said, Did she care about me?’

‘Piph-ph-ph!’

‘And then she said nothing for a quarter of a mile, and then she said she didn’t know. Now, what I want to know is, what was the meaning of that speech?’ The latter words were spoken resolutely, as if he didn’t care for the ridicule of all the fathers in creation.

‘The maning of that speech is,’ the tranter replied deliberately, ‘that the maning is rather hid at present. Well, Dick, as an honest father to thee, I don’t pretend to deny what you d’know well enough; that is, that her father being rather better in the world than we, I should welcome her ready enough if it must be somebody.’

‘But what d’ye think she really did mean?’ said Dick.

‘I’m afeard I ben’t o’ much account in guessing, especially as I was not there when she said it, and seeing that your mother was the only woman I ever cam into such close quarters as that wi’.’

‘And what did mother say to you when you asked her?’ said Dick musingly.

‘I don’t see that that will help ye.’

‘The principle is the same.’

‘Well—ay: what did she say? Let’s see. I was oiling my working-day boots without

taking 'em off, and wi' my head hanging down, when she just brushed on by the garden hatch like a fluttering leaf. "Ann," I said, says I, and then,—but, Dick, I be afeard 'twill be no help to thee; for we were such a rum couple, your mother and I, leastways one half was, that is myself—and your mother's charms was more in the manner than the material.'

'Never mind! "Ann," said you.'

"Ann," said I, as I was saying . . . "Ann," I said to her when I was oiling my working-day boots wi' my head hanging down, "Woot hae me?" What came next I can't quite call up at this distance o' time. Perhaps your mother would know, —she's a better memory for her little triumphs than I. However, the long and the short o' the story is that we were married somehow, as I found afterwards. 'Twas on White Tuesday, —Mellstock Club walked

the same day, every man two and two, and a fine day 'twas,—hot as fire,—the sun did strik' down upon my back going to church! I well can mind what a bath o' sweating I was in, body and mind! But Fance will ha' thee, Dick—she won't walk wi' another chap—no such good luck.'

'I don't know about that,' said Dick, whipping at Smart's flank in a fanciful way, which, as Smart knew, meant nothing in connection with going on. 'There's Pa'son Maybold, too—that's all against me.'

'What about he? She's never been stuffing into thy innocent heart that he's in love wi' her? Lord, the vanity o' maidens!'

'No, no. But he called, and she looked at him in such a way, and at me in such a way—quite different the ways were,—and as I was coming off, there was he hanging up her birdcage.'

'Well, why shouldn't the man hang up

her birdcage? Turk seize it all, what's that got to do wi' it? Dick, that thou beest a white-lyvered chap I don't say, but if thou beestn't as mad as a cappel-faced bull, let me smile no more.'

'O, ay.'

'And what's think now, Dick?'

'I don't know.'

'Here's another pretty kettle o' fish for thee. Who d'ye think's the bitter weed in our being turned out? Did our party tell'ee?'

'No. Why, Pa'son Maybold, I suppose.'

'Shinar,—because he's in love with thy young woman, and d'want to see her young figure sitting up at that quare instrume't, and her young fingers rum-strumming upon the keys.'

A sharp ado of sweet and bitter was going on in Dick during this communication from his father. 'Shinar's a fool!—no, that's not it; I don't believe any such thing,

father. Why, Shinar would never take a determined step like that, unless she'd been a little made up to, and had taken it kindly. Pooh!

'Who's to say she didn't?'

'I do.'

'The more fool you.'

'Why, father of me?'

'Has she ever done more to thee?'

'No.'

'Then she has done as much to he—rot 'em! Now, Dick, this is how a maiden is. She'll swear she's dying for thee, and she is dying for thee, and she will die for thee; but she'll fling a look over t'other shoulder at another young feller, though never leaving off dying for thee just the same.'

'She's not dying for me, and so she didn't fling a look at him.'

'But she may be dying for him, for she looked at thee.'

‘I don’t know what to make of it at all,’ said Dick gloomily.

‘All I can make of it is,’ the tranter said, raising his whip, arranging his different joints and muscles, and motioning to the horse to move on, ‘that if you can’t read a maid’s mind by her motions, nater d’s seem to say thou’st ought to be a bachelor. Clk, clk! Smiler!’ And the tranter moved on.

Dick held Smart’s rein firmly, and the whole concern of horse, cart, and man remained rooted in the lane. How long this condition would have lasted is unknown, had not Dick’s thoughts, after adding up numerous items of misery, gradually wandered round to the fact, that as something must be done, it could not be done by staying there all night.

Reaching home he went up to his bedroom, shut the door as if he were going to be seen no more in this life, and taking a

sheet of paper and uncorking the ink-bottle, he began a letter. The dignity of the writer's mind was so powerfully apparent in every line of this effusion, that it obscured the logical sequence of facts and intentions to such an appreciable degree that it was not at all clear to a reader whether he there and then left off loving Miss Fancy Day; whether he had never loved her seriously, and never meant to; whether he had been dying up to the present moment, and now intended to get well again; or whether he had hitherto been in good health, and intended to die for her forthwith.

He put this letter in an envelope, sealed it up, directed it in a stern handwriting of straight firm dashes—easy flourishes being rigorously excluded. He walked with it in his pocket down the lane in strides not an inch less than three feet and a half long. Reaching her gate he put on a resolute ex-

pression—then put it off again, turned back homeward, tore up his letter, and sat down.

That letter was altogether in a wrong tone—that he must own. A heartless man-of-the-world tone was what the juncture required. That he rather wanted her, and rather did not want her—the latter for choice; but that as a member of society he didn't mind making a query in plain terms, which could only be answered in the same plain terms: did she mean anything by her bearing towards him, or did she not?

This letter was considered so satisfactory in every way that, being put into the hands of a little boy, and the order given that he was to run with it to the school, he was told in addition not to look behind him if Dick called after him to bring it back, but to run along with it just the same. Having taken this precaution against vacillation, Dick watched his messenger down the road, and

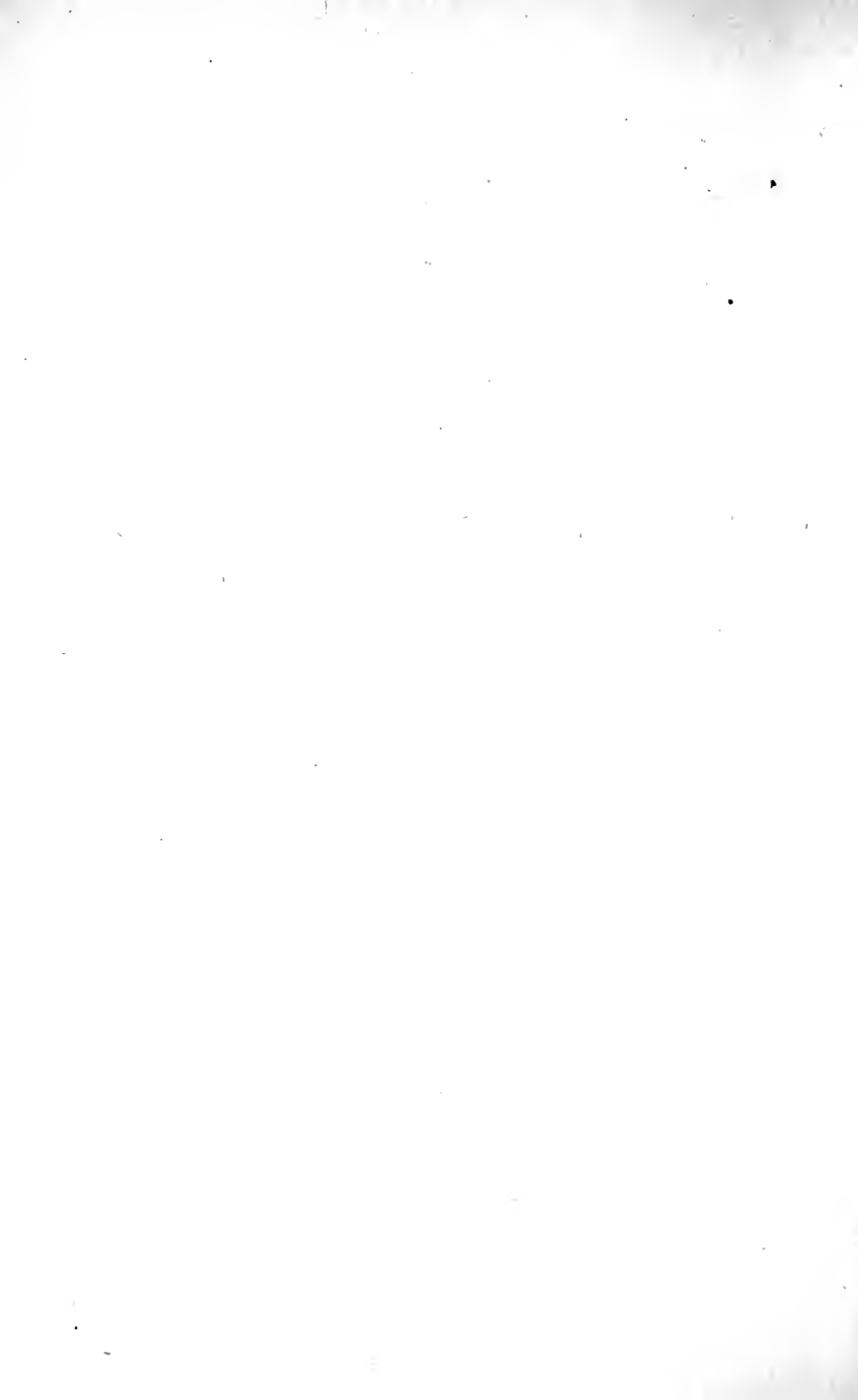
turned into the house whistling an air in such ghastly jerks and starts, that whistling seemed to be the act the very farthest removed from that which was instinctive in such a youth.

The letter was left as ordered: the next morning came and passed—and no answer. The next. The next. Friday night came. Dick resolved that if no answer or sign were given by her the next day, on Sunday he would meet her face to face, and have it all out by word of mouth.

‘Dick,’ said his father, coming in from the garden at that moment—in each hand a hive of bees tied in a cloth to prevent their egress—‘I think you’d better take these two swarms of bees to Mrs. Maybold’s to-morrow, instead o’ me, and I’ll go wi’ Smiler and the wagon.’

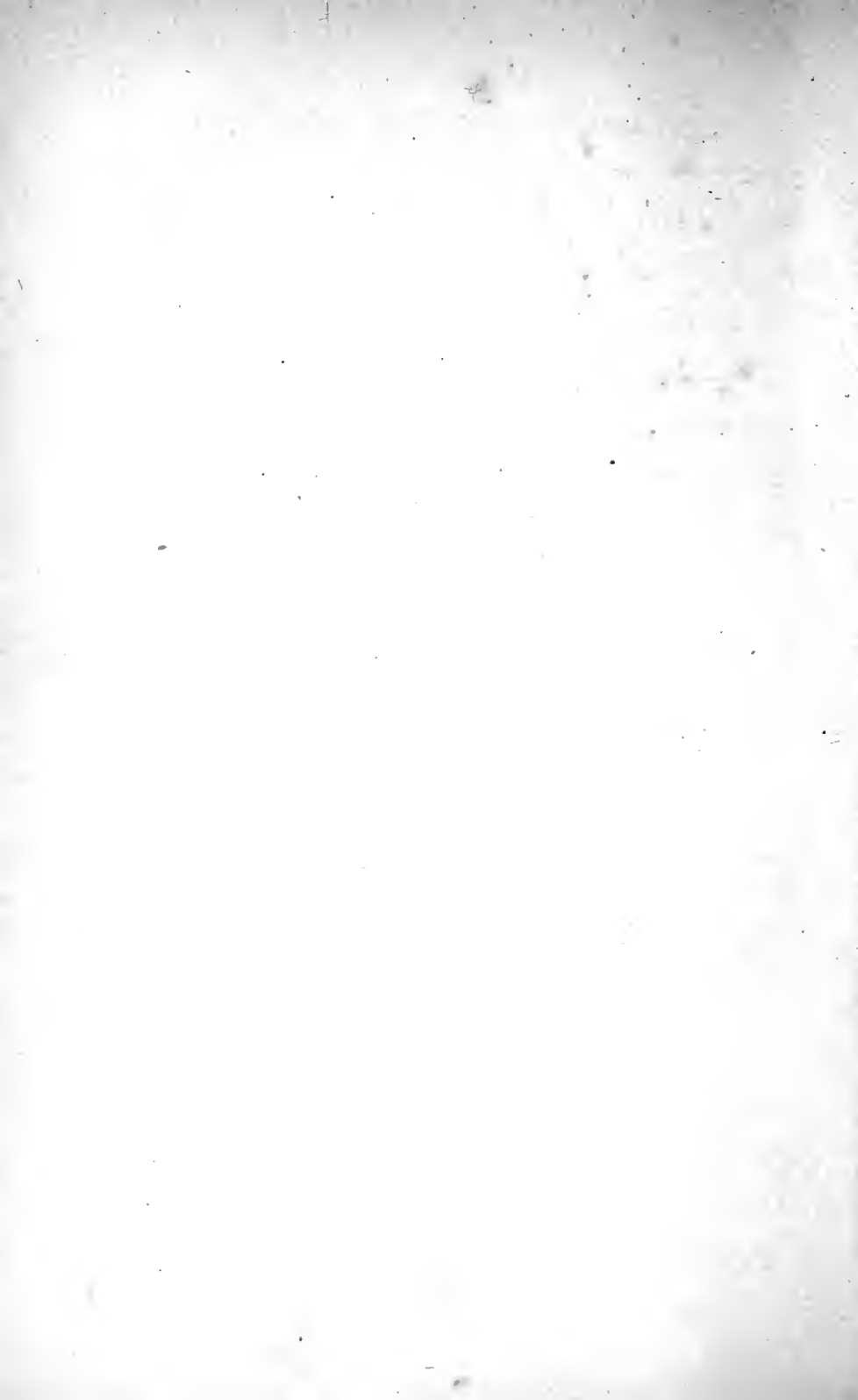
It was a relief; for Mrs. Maybold, the vicar’s mother, who had just taken into her

head a fancy for keeping bees (pleasantly disguised under the pretence of its being an economical wish to produce her own honey), lived at a watering-place fourteen miles off, and the business of transporting the hives thither would occupy the whole day, and to some extent annihilate the vacant time between this evening and the coming Sunday. The best spring-cart was washed throughout, the axles oiled, and the bees placed therein for the journey.



PART III.

S U M M E R.



CHAPTER I.

DRIVING OUT OF BUDMOUTH.

AN easy bend of neck and graceful set of head; full and wavy bundles of dark-brown hair; light fall of little feet; pretty devices on the skirt of the dress; clear deep eyes; in short, a bunch of sweets: it was Fancy! Dick's heart went round to her with a rush.

The scene was the corner of the front street at Budmouth, at which point the angle of the last house in the row cuts perpendicularly a wide expanse of nearly motionless ocean—to-day, shaded in bright tones of green and opal. Dick and Smart

had just emerged from the street, and there, against the brilliant sheet of liquid colour, stood Fancy Day; and she turned and recognised him.

Dick suspended his thoughts of the letter and wonder at how she came there by driving close to the edge of the parade—displacing two chairmen, who had just come to life for the summer in new clean shirts and revived clothes, and being almost displaced in turn by a rigid boy advancing with a roll under his arm, and looking neither to the right nor the left—and asking if she were going to Mellstock that night.

‘Yes, I’m waiting for the carrier,’ she replied, seeming, too, to suspend thoughts of the letter.

‘Now I can drive you home nicely, and you save an hour. Will you come with me?’

As Fancy’s power to will anything

seemed to have departed in some mysterious manner at that moment, Dick settled the matter by getting out and assisting her into the vehicle without another word.

The temporary flush upon her cheek changed to a lesser hue, which was permanent, and at length their eyes met; there was present between them a certain feeling of embarrassment, which arises at such moments when all the instinctive acts dictated by the position have been performed. Dick, being engaged with the reins, thought less of this awkwardness than did Fancy, who had nothing to do but to feel his presence, and to be more and more conscious of the fact, that by accepting a seat beside him in this way she succumbed to the tone of his note. Smart jogged along, and Dick jogged, and the helpless Fancy necessarily jogged too; and she felt that she was in a measure captured and made a prisoner.

‘I am so much obliged to you for your company, Miss Day.’

To Miss Day, crediting him with the same consciousness of mastery—a consciousness of which he was perfectly innocent—this remark sounded like a magnanimous intention to soothe her, the captive.

‘I didn’t come for the pleasure of obliging you with my company,’ she said.

The answer had an unexpected manner of incivility in it that must have been rather surprising to young Dewy. At the same time it may be observed, that when a young woman returns a rude answer to a young man’s civil remark, her heart is in a state which argues rather hopefully for his case than otherwise.

There was silence between them till they had passed about twenty of the equidistant elm-trees that ornamented the road leading up out of the town.

‘ Though I didn’t come for that purpose either, I would have,’ said Dick at the twenty-first tree.

‘ Now, Mr. Dewy, no flirtation, because it’s wrong, and I don’t wish it.’

Dick seated himself afresh just as he had been sitting before, and arranged his looks very emphatically, then cleared his throat.

‘ Really, anybody would think you had met me on business and were just going to begin,’ said the lady intractably.

‘ Yes, they would.’

‘ Why, you never have, to be sure!’

This was a shaky beginning. He chopped round, and said cheerily, as a man who had resolved never to spoil his jollity by loving one of womankind,

‘ Well, how are you getting on, Miss Day, at the present time? Gaily, I don’t doubt for a moment.’

‘I am not gay, Dick; you know that.’

‘Gaily doesn’t mean decked in gay dresses.’

‘I didn’t suppose gaily was gaily dressed. Mighty me, what a scholar you’ve grown!’

‘Lots of things have happened to you this spring, I see.’

‘What have you seen?’

‘O, nothing; I’ve heard, I mean!’

‘What have you heard?’

‘The name of a pretty man, with brass studs and a copper ring and a tin watch-chain, a little mixed up with your own. That’s all.’

‘That’s a very unkind picture of Mr. Shinar, for that’s who you mean. The studs are gold, as you know, and it’s a real silver chain; the ring I can’t conscientiously defend, and he only wore it once.’

‘He might have worn it a hundred times without showing it half so much.’

‘ Well, he’s nothing to me,’ she serenely observed.

‘ Not any more than I am?’

‘ Now, Mr. Dewy,’ said Fancy severely, ‘ certainly he isn’t any more to me than you are!’

‘ Not so much?’

She looked aside to consider the precise compass of that question. ‘ That I can’t exactly answer,’ she replied with soft archness.

As they were going rather slowly, another spring-cart, containing a farmer, farmer’s wife, and farmer’s man, jogged past them; and the farmer’s wife and farmer’s man eyed the couple very curiously. The farmer never looked up from the horse’s tail.

‘ Why can’t you exactly answer?’ said Dick, quickening Smart a little, and jogging on just behind the farmer and farmer’s wife and man.

As no answer came, and as their eyes had

nothing else to do, they both contemplated the picture presented in front, and noticed how the farmer's wife sat flattened between the two men, who bulged over each end of the seat to give her room, till they almost sat upon their respective wheels; and they looked too at the farmer's wife's silk mantle, inflating itself between her shoulders like a balloon, and sinking flat again, at each jog of the horse. The farmer's wife, feeling their eyes sticking into her back, looked over her shoulder. Dick dropped ten yards farther behind.

‘Fancy, why can't you answer?’ he repeated.

‘Because how much you are to me depends upon how much I am to you,’ said she in low tones.

‘Everything,’ said Dick, putting his hand towards hers, and casting emphatic eyes upon the upper curve of her cheek.

‘Now, Richard Dewy, no touching me. I didn’t say in what way your thinking of me affected the question — perhaps inversely, don’t you see? No touching, sir! Look; goodness me, don’t, Dick!’

The cause of her sudden start was the unpleasant appearance over Dick’s right shoulder of an empty timber-wagon and four journeymen-carpenters reclining in lazy postures inside it, their eyes directed upwards at various oblique angles into the surrounding world, the chief object of their existence being apparently to criticise to the very backbone and marrow every animate object that came within the compass of their vision. This difficulty of Dick’s was overcome by trotting on till the wagon and carpenters were beginning to look reduced in size and rather misty, by reason of a film of dust that accompanied their wagon-wheels, and rose around their heads like a fog.

‘ Say you love me, Fancy.’

‘ No, Dick, certainly not; ’tisn’t time to do that yet.’

‘ Why, Fancy?’

‘ “ Miss Day ” is better at present—don’t mind my saying so; and I ought not to have called you Dick.’

‘ Nonsense! when you know that I would do anything on earth for your love. Why, you make any one think that loving is a thing that can be done and undone, and put on and put off at a mere whim.’

‘ No, no, I don’t,’ she said gently; ‘ but there are things which tell me I ought not to give way to much thinking about you, even if—’

‘ But you want to, don’t you? Yes, say you do; it is best to be truthful, Fancy. Whatever they may say about a woman’s right to conceal where her love lies, and pretend it doesn’t exist, and things like

that, it is not best; I do know it, Fancy. And an honest woman in that, as well as in all her daily concerns, shines most brightly, and is thought most of in the long-run.'

'Well then, perhaps, Dick, I do love you a little,' she whispered tenderly; 'but I wish you wouldn't say any more now.'

'I won't say any more now, then, if you don't like it. But you do love me a little, don't you?'

'Now you ought not to want me to keep saying things twice; I can't say any more now, and you must be content with what you have.'

'I may at any rate call you Fancy? There's no harm in that.'

'Yes, you may.'

'And you'll not call me Mr. Dewy any more?'

'Very well.'

CHAPTER II.

FARTHER ALONG THE ROAD.

DICK'S spirits having risen in the course of these admissions of his sweetheart, he now touched Smart with the whip; and on Smart's neck, not far behind his ears. Smart, who had been lost in thought for some time, never dreaming that Dick could reach so far with a whip which, on this particular journey, had never been extended farther than his flank, tossed his head, and scampered along with exceeding briskness, which was very pleasant to the young couple behind him till, turning a bend in the road, they came instantly upon the

farmer, farmer's man, and farmer's wife with the flapping mantle, all jogging on just the same as ever.

‘Bother those people! Here we are upon them again.’

‘Well, of course. They have as much right to the road as we.’

‘Yes, but it is provoking to be overlooked so. I like a road all to myself. Look what a lumbering affair theirs is!’ The wheels of the farmer's cart, just at that moment, jogged into a depression running across the road, giving the cart a twist, whereupon all three nodded to the left, and on coming out of it all three nodded to the right, and went on jerking their backs in and out as usual. ‘We'll pass them when the road gets wider.’

When an opportunity seemed to offer itself for carrying this intention into effect, hey heard light flying wheels behind, and

on quartering, there whizzed along past them a brand-new gig, so brightly polished that the spokes of the wheels sent forth a continual quivering light at one point in their circle, and all the panels glared like mirrors in Dick and Fancy's eyes. The driver, and owner as it appeared, was really a handsome man ; his companion was Shinar. Both turned round as they passed Dick and Fancy, and stared steadily in her face till they were obliged to attend to the operation of passing the farmer. Dick glanced for an instant at Fancy while she was undergoing their scrutiny; then returned to his driving with rather a sad countenance.

‘Why are you so silent?’ she said, after a while, with real concern.

‘Nothing.’

‘Yes, it is, Dick. I couldn't help those people passing.’

‘I know that.’

‘You look offended with me. What have I done?’

‘I can’t tell without offending you.’

‘Better out.’

‘Well,’ said Dick, who seemed longing to tell, even at the risk of offending her, ‘I was thinking how different you in love are from me in love. Whilst those men were staring, you dismissed me from your thoughts altogether, and—’

‘You can’t offend me farther now; tell all.’

‘And showed upon your face a flattered consciousness of being attractive to them.’

‘Don’t be silly, Dick! You know very well I didn’t.’

Dick shook his head sceptically, and smiled.

‘Dick, I always believe flattery *if possible*—and it was possible then. Now there’s

an open confession of weakness. But I showed no consciousness of it.'

Dick, perceiving by her look that she would adhere to her statement, charitably forbore saying anything that could make her prevaricate. The sight of Shinar, too, had recalled another branch of the subject to his mind; that which had been his greatest trouble till her company and words had obscured its probability.

'By the way, Fancy, do you know why our choir is to be dismissed?'

'No: except that it is Mr. Maybold's wish for me to play the organ.'

'Do you know how it came to be his wish?'

'That I don't.'

'Mr. Shinar, being churchwarden, has persuaded the vicar; who, however, was willing enough before. Shinar, I know, is crazy to see you playing every Sunday; I

suppose he'll turn over your music, for the organ will be close to his pew. But—I know you have never encouraged him?’

‘Never once!’ said Fancy emphatically, and with eyes full of earnest truth. ‘I don’t like him indeed, and I never heard of his doing this before! I have always felt that I should like to play in a church, but I never wished to turn you and your choir out; and I never even said that I could play till I was asked. You don’t think for a moment that I did, surely, do you?’

‘I know you didn’t, Fancy.’

‘Or that I care the least morsel of a bit for him?’

‘I know you don’t.’

The distance between Budmouth and Mellstock was eighteen miles, and there being a good inn six miles out of Budmouth, Dick’s custom in driving thither was to divide his journey into three stages

by resting at this inn, going and coming, and not troubling the Budmouth stables at all, whenever his visit to the town was a mere call and deposit, as to-day.

Fancy was ushered into a little tea-room, and Dick went to the stables to see to the feeding of Smart. In face of the significant ^{of}_{his} twitches of feature that were visible in the ostler and odd men idling around, Dick endeavoured to look unconscious of the fact that there was any sentiment between him and Fancy beyond a tranter's desire to carry a passenger home. He presently entered the inn and opened the door of Fancy's room.

'Dick, do you know, it has struck me that it is rather awkward, my being here alone with you like this. I don't think you had better come in with me.'

'That's rather unpleasant.'

'Yes, it is, and I wanted you to have

some tea as well as myself too, because you must be tired.'

'Well, let me have some with you, then. I was denied once before, if you recollect, Fancy.'

'Yes, yes, never mind! And it seems unfriendly of me now, but I don't know what to do.'

'It shall be as you say, then,' said Dick, beginning to retreat with a dissatisfied wrinkling of face, and giving a farewell glance at the cosy tea-tray.

'But you don't see how it is, Dick, when you speak like that,' she said, with more earnestness than she had ever shown before. 'You do know, that even if I care very much for you, I must remember that I have a difficult position to maintain. The vicar would not like me, as his school-mistress, to indulge in *tête-à-têtes* anywhere with anybody.'

‘But I am not *any* body!’ exclaimed Dick.

‘No, no, I mean with a young man;’ and she added softly, ‘unless I were really engaged to be married to him.’

‘Is that all? then, dearest, dearest, why we’ll be engaged at once, to be sure we will, and down I sit! There it is, as easy as a glove!’

‘Ah! but suppose I won’t! And, goodness me, what have I done!’ she faltered, getting very red and confused. ‘Positively, it seems as if I meant you to say that!’

‘Let’s do it! I mean get engaged,’ said Dick. ‘Now, Fancy, will you be my wife?’

‘Do you know, Dick, it was rather unkind of you to say what you did coming along the road,’ she remarked, as if she had not heard the latter part of his speech; though an acute observer might have noticed about her breast, as the word ‘wife’

fell from Dick's lips, soft motions consisting of a silent escape of pants, with very short rests between each.

'What did I say?'

'About my trying to look attractive to those men in the gig.'

'You couldn't help looking so, whether you tried or no. And, Fancy, you do care for me?'

'Yes.'

'Very much?'

'Yes.'

'And you'll be my own wife?'

Her heart grew boisterous, adding to and withdrawing from the cheek varying tones of red to match each varying thought. Dick looked expectantly at the ripe tint of her delicate mouth, waiting for what was coming forth.

'Yes—if father will let me.'

Dick drew himself close to her, com-

pressing his lips and pouting them out, as if he were about to whistle the softest melody known.

‘O no!’ said Fancy solemnly; and the modest Dick drew back a little.

‘O Dick, Dick, kiss me, and let me go instantly! here’s somebody coming!’ she exclaimed.

* * * * * *

Half an hour afterwards Dick emerged from the inn, and if Fancy’s lips had been real cherries, Dick’s would have appeared deeply stained. The landlord was standing in the yard.

‘Heu-heu! hay-hay, Master Dewy! Ho-ho!’ he laughed, letting the laugh slip out gently and by degrees, that it might make little noise in its exit, and smiting Dick under the fifth rib at the same time. ‘This will never do, upon my life, Master Dewy! calling for tay for a passenger, and then

going in and sitting down and having some too !

‘ But surely you know ? ’ said Dick, with great apparent surprise. ‘ Yes, yes ! Ha-ha ! ’ smiting the landlord under the ribs in return.

‘ Why, what ? Yes, yes ; ha-ha ! ’

‘ You know, yes ; ha-ha, of course ! ’

‘ Yes, of course ! But—that is—I don’t. ’

‘ Why about—between that young lady and me ? ’ nodding to the window of the room that Fancy occupied.

‘ No ; not I ! ’ bringing his eyes into mathematical circles.

‘ And you don’t ! ’

‘ Not a word, I’ll take my oath ! ’

‘ But you laughed, when I laughed. ’

‘ Ay, that was me sympathy ; so did you when I laughed ! ’

‘ Really, you don’t know ? Goodness—not knowing that ! ’

‘I’ll take my oath I don’t!’

‘O yes,’ said Dick, with frigid rhetoric of pitying astonishment, ‘we’re engaged to be married, you see, and I naturally look after her.’

‘Of course, of course! I didn’t know that, and I hope ye’ll excuse any little freedom of mine. But it is a very odd thing; I was talking to your father very intimate about family matters, only last Friday in the world, and who should come in but keeper Day, and we all then fell a-talking o’ family matters; but neither one o’ them said a mortal word about it; known me too so many years, and I at your father’s own wedding. Tisn’t what I should have expected from a old naighbour.’

‘Well, to tell the truth, we hadn’t told father of the engagement at that time; in fact, ’twasn’t settled.’

‘Ah! the business was done Sunday.’

Yes, yes, Sunday's the courting day. Heu-heu !'

'No, 'twasn't done Sunday in particular.'

'After school-hours this week? Well, a very good time, a very proper good time.'

'O no, 'twasn't done then.'

'Coming along the road to-day then, I suppose?'

'Not at all; I wouldn't think of getting engaged in a cart.'

'Dammy—might as well have said at once, the *when* be blowed! Anyhow, 'tis a fine day, and I hope next time you'll come as one.'

Fancy was duly brought out and assisted into the vehicle, and the newly-affianced youth and maiden passed over the bridge, and vanished in the direction of Mellstock.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION.

It was a morning of the latter summer-time; a morning of lingering dews, when the grass is never dry in the shade. Fuschias and dahlias were laden till eleven o'clock with small drops and dashes of water, changing the colour of their sparkle at every movement of the air, or hanging on twigs like small silver fruit. The threads of garden spiders appeared thick and polished. In the dry and sunny places, dozens of long-legged crane-flies whizzed off the grass at every step the passer took.

Fancy Day and her friend Susan Dewy were in such a spot as this, pulling down a

bough laden with early apples. Three months had elapsed since Dick and Fancy had journeyed together from Budmouth, and the course of their love had run on vigorously during the whole time. There had been just enough difficulty attending its development, and just enough finesse required in keeping it private, to lend the passion an ever-increasing freshness on Fancy's part, whilst, whether from these accessories or not, Dick's heart had been at all times as fond as could be desired. But there was a cloud on Fancy's horizon now.

'She is so well off—better than any of us,' Susan Dewy was saying. 'Her father farms five hundred acres, and she might marry a doctor or curate or anything of that kind, if she contrived a little.'

'I don't think Dick ought to have gone to that gipsy-party at all when he knew I couldn't go,' replied Fancy uneasily.

‘He didn’t know that you would not be there till it was too late to decline the invitation,’ said Susan.

‘And what was she like? Tell me.’

‘Well, she was rather pretty, I must own.’

‘Tell straight on about her, can’t you! Come, do, Susan. How many times did you say he danced with her?’

‘Once.’

‘Twice, I think you said?’

‘Indeed, I’m sure I didn’t.’

‘Well, and he wanted to again, I expect.’

‘No; I don’t think he did. She wanted to dance with him again badly enough, I know. Everybody does with Dick, because he’s so handsome and such a clever courter.’

‘O, I wish!—How did you say she wore her hair?’

‘In long curls,—and her hair is light, and it curls without being put in paper: that’s how it is she’s so attractive.’

‘She’s trying to get him away! yes, yes, she is! And through keeping this miserable school I mustn’t wear my hair in curls! But I will; I don’t care if I leave the school and go home, I will wear my curls! Look, Susan, do: is her hair as soft and long as this?’ Fancy pulled from its coil under her hat a twine of her own hair, and stretched it down her shoulder to show its length, eagerly looking at Susan to catch her opinion from her eyes.

‘It is about the same length as that, I think,’ said Miss Dewy.

Fancy paused hopelessly. ‘I wish mine was lighter, like hers!’ she continued mournfully. ‘But hers isn’t so soft, is it? Tell me, now.’

‘I don’t know.’

Fancy abstractedly extended her vision to survey a yellow butterfly and a red-and-black butterfly, that were flitting along in

company, and then became aware that Dick was advancing up the garden.

‘Susan, here’s Dick coming; I suppose that’s because we’ve been talking about him.’

‘Well, then, I shall go indoors now—you won’t want me;’ and Susan turned practically and walked off.

Enter the single-minded Dick, whose only fault at the gipsying, or picnic, had been that of loving Fancy too exclusively, and depriving himself of the innocent pleasure the gathering might have afforded him, by sighing regretfully at her absence,—who had danced with the rival in sheer despair of ever being able to get through that stale, flat, and unprofitable afternoon in any other way; but this she would not believe.

Fancy had settled her plan of emotion. To reproach Dick? O no, no. ‘I am in great trouble,’ said she, taking what was intended to be a hopelessly melancholy sur-

vey of a few small apples lying under the tree; yet a critical ear might have noticed in her voice a tentative tone as to the effect of the words upon Dick when she uttered them.

‘What are you in trouble about? Tell me of it,’ said Dick earnestly. ‘Darling, I will share it with you and help you.’

‘No, no: you can’t! Nobody can!’

‘Why not? You don’t deserve it, whatever it is. Tell me, dear.’

‘O, it isn’t what you think! It is dreadful: my own sin!’

‘Sin, Fancy! as if you could sin! I know it can’t be.’

‘’Tis, ’tis!’ said the young lady, in a pretty little frenzy of sorrow. ‘I have done wrong, and I don’t like to tell it! Nobody will forgive me, nobody! and you above all will not! . . . I have allowed myself to—to—fl—’

‘What,—not flirt!’ he said, controlling

his emotion as it were by a sudden pressure inward from his surface. 'And you said only the day before yesterday that you hadn't flirted in your life!'

'Yes, I did; and that was a wicked story! I have let another love me, and—'

'Good G—! Well, I'll forgive you,—yes, if you couldn't help it,—yes, I will!' said the now miserable Dick. 'Did you encourage him?'

'O, O, O,—I don't know,—yes—no. O, I think so!'

'Who was it?'

A pause.

'Tell me!'

'Mr. Shinar.'

After a silence that was only disturbed by the fall of an apple, a long-checked sigh from Dick, and a sob from Fancy, he said with real austerity,

'Tell it all;—every word!'

‘He looked at me, and I looked at him, and he said, “Will you let me show you how to catch bullfinches down here by the stream?” And I—wanted to know very much—I did so long to have a bullfinch! I couldn’t help that!—and I said, “Yes!” and then he said, “Come here.” And I went with him down to the lovely river, and then he said to me, “Look and see how I do it, and then you’ll know: I put this birdlime round this twig, and then I go here,” he said, “and hide away under a bush; and presently clever Mister Bird comes and perches upon the twig, and flaps his wings, and you’ve got him before you can say Jack”—something! O, O, O, I forget what!’

‘Jack Sprat,’ mournfully suggested Dick through the cloud of his misery.

‘No, not Jack Sprat,’ she sobbed.

‘Then ’twas Jack Robinson!’ he said, with

the emphasis of a man who had resolved to discover every iota of the truth, or die.

‘Yes, that was it! And then I put my hand upon the rail of the bridge to get across, and—That’s all.’

‘Well, that isn’t much, either,’ said Dick critically, and more cheerfully. ‘Not that I see what business Shinar has to take upon himself to teach you anything. But it seems—it seems there must have been more than that to set you up in such a dreadful taking?’

He looked into Fancy’s eyes. Misery of miseries!—guilt was written there still.

‘Now, Fancy, you’ve not told me all!’ said Dick, rather sternly for a quiet young man.

‘O, don’t speak so cruelly! I am afraid to tell now! If you hadn’t been harsh, I was going on to tell all; now I can’t!’

‘Come, dear Fancy, tell: come. I’ll

forgive; I must,—by heaven and earth, I must, whether I will or no; I love you so!

‘Well, when I put my hand on the bridge, he touched it—’

‘A scamp!’ said Dick, grinding an imaginary human frame to powder.

‘And then he looked at me, and at last he said, “Are you in love with Dick Dewy?” And I said, “Perhaps I am;” and then he said, “I wish you weren’t then, for I want to marry you, with all my soul.”’

‘There’s a villain now! Want to marry you!’ And Dick quivered with the bitterness of satirical laughter. Then suddenly remembering that he might be reckoning without his host: ‘Unless, indeed, you are willing to have him,—perhaps you are,’ he said, with the wretched indifference of a castaway.

‘No, indeed I am not!’ she said, her sobs just beginning to take a favourable turn towards cure.

‘Well, then,’ said Dick, coming a little to his senses, ‘you’ve been exaggerating very much in giving such a dreadful beginning to such a mere nothing. And I know what you’ve done it for,—just because of that gipsy-party!’ He turned away from her and walked five paces decisively, as if he were alone in a strange country and had never known her. ‘You did it to make me jealous, and I won’t stand it!’ He flung the words to her over his shoulder and then stalked on, apparently very anxious to walk to the colonies that very minute.

‘O, O, O, Dick—Dick!’ she cried, trotting after him like a pet lamb, and really seriously alarmed at last, ‘you’ll kill me! My impulses are bad—miserably wicked,—and I can’t help it; forgive me, Dick! And I love you always; and those times when you look silly and don’t seem quite good enough for me,—just the same, I do, Dick!

And there is something more serious, though not concerning that walk with him.'

'Well, what is it?' said Dick, altering his mind about walking to the colonies; in fact, passing to the other extreme, and standing so rooted to the road that he was apparently not even going home.

'Why this,' she said, drying the beginning of a new flood of tears she had been going to shed, 'this is the serious part. Father has told Mr. Shinar that he would like him for a son-in-law, if he could get me;—that he has his right hearty consent to come courting me!'

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARRANGEMENT.

‘*THAT is serious,*’ said Dick, more intellectually than he had spoken for a long time.

The truth was that Geoffrey knew nothing about his daughter’s continued walks and meetings with Dick. When a hint that there were symptoms of an attachment between them had first reached Geoffrey’s ears, he stated so emphatically that he must think the matter over before any such thing could be allowed, that, rather unwisely on Dick’s part, whatever it might have been on the lady’s, the lovers were careful to be seen

together no more in public; and Geoffrey, forgetting the report, did not think over the matter at all. So Mr. Shinar resumed his old position in Geoffrey's brain by mere flux of time. Even Shinar began to believe that Dick existed for Fancy no more,—though that remarkably easy-going man had taken no active steps on his own account as yet.

‘And father has not only told Mr. Shinar that,’ continued Fancy, ‘but he has written me a letter, to say he should wish me to encourage Mr. Shinar, if ’twas convenient!’

‘I must start off and see your father at once!’ said Dick, taking two or three vehement steps to the east, recollecting that Mr. Day lived to the west, and coming back again.

‘I think we had better see him together. Not tell him what you come for, or anything of the kind, until he likes you, and so

win his brain through his heart, which is always the way to manage people. I mean in this way: I am going home on Saturday week to help them in the honey-taking. You might come there to me, have something to eat and drink, and let him guess what your coming signifies, without saying it in so many words.'

'We'll do it, dearest. But I shall ask him for you, flat and plain; not wait for his guessing.' And the lover then stepped close to her, and attempted to give her one little kiss on the cheek, his lips alighting, however, on an outlying tract of her back hair, by reason of an impulse that had caused her to turn her head with a jerk. 'Yes, and I'll put on my second-best suit and a clean collar, and black my boots as if 'twas a Sunday. 'Twill have a good appearance, you see, and that's a great deal to start with.'

‘You won’t wear that old waistcoat, will you, Dick?’

‘Bless you, no! Why I—’

‘I didn’t mean to be personal, dear Dick,’ she said apologetically, fearing she had hurt his feelings. ‘Tis a very nice waistcoat, but what I meant was, that though it is an excellent waistcoat for a settled-down man, it is not quite one for’ (she waited, and a blush expanded over her face, and then she went on again) — ‘for going courting in.’

‘No, I’ll wear my best winter one, with the leather lining, that mother made. It is a beautiful, handsome waistcoat inside, yes, as ever anybody saw. In fact, only the other day, I unbuttoned it to show a chap that very lining, and he said it was the strongest, handsomest lining you could wish to see on the king’s waistcoat himself.’

‘I don’t quite know what to wear,’ she

said, as if her habitual indifference alone to dress had kept back so important a subject till now.

‘Why, that blue dress you wore last week.’

‘Doesn’t set well round the neck. I couldn’t wear that.’

‘But I sha’n’t care.’

‘No, you won’t mind.’

‘Well, then it’s all right. Because you only care how you look to me, do you, dear? I only dress for you, that’s certain.’

‘Yes, but you see I couldn’t appear in it again very well.’

‘Any strange gentleman you may meet in your journey might notice the set of it, I suppose. Fancy, men in love don’t think so much about how they appear to other women.’ It is difficult to say whether a tone of playful banter or of gentle reproach prevailed in the speech.

‘Well then, Dick,’ she said, with good-

humoured frankness, 'I'll own it. I shouldn't like a stranger to see me dressed badly, even though I am in love. 'Tis our nature, I suppose.'

'You perfect woman!'

'Yes; if you lay the stress on "woman,"' she murmured, looking at a group of hollyhocks in flower, round which a crowd of butterflies had gathered like females round a bonnet-shop.

'But about the dress. Why not wear the one you wore at our party?'

'That sets well, but a girl of the name of Bet Taylor, who lives near our house, has had one made almost like it (only in pattern, though of miserably cheap stuff), and I couldn't wear it on that account. Dear me, I am afraid I can't go now.'

'O yes, you must; I know you will!' said Dick, with dismay. 'Why not wear what you've got on?'

‘What! this old one! After all, I think that by wearing my gray one Saturday, I can make the blue one do for Sunday. Yes, I will. A hat or a bonnet, which shall it be? Which do I look best in?’

‘Well, I think the bonnet is nicest, more quiet and matronly.’

‘What’s the objection to the hat? Does it make me look old?’

‘O no; the hat is well enough; but it makes you look rather too—you won’t mind me saying it, dear?’

‘Not at all, for I shall wear the bonnet.’

‘—Rather too coquettish and flirty for an engaged young woman.’

She reflected a minute. ‘Yes, yes. Still, after all, the hat would do best; hats are best, you see. Yes, I must wear the hat, dear Dicky, because I ought to wear a hat, you know.’

PART IV.

AUTUMN.

CHAPTER I.

GOING NUTTING.

DICK, dressed in his 'second-best' suit, burst into Fancy's sitting-room with a glow of pleasure on his face.

It was two o'clock on Friday, the day before Fancy's contemplated visit to her father, and for some reason connected with cleaning the school, the children had had given them this Friday afternoon for pastime, in addition to the usual Saturday.

'Fancy! it happens just right that it is a leisure half day with you. Smart is lame in his near-foot-afore, and so, as I can't do anything, I've made a holiday afternoon of

it, and am come for you to go nutting with me!’

She was sitting by the window, with a blue dress lying across her lap, and the scissors in her hand.

‘Go nutting! Yes. But I’m afraid I can’t go for an hour or so.’

‘Why not? ’Tis the only spare afternoon we may both have together for weeks.’

‘This dress of mine, that I am going to wear on Sunday at Yalbury;—I find it sets so badly that I must alter it a little, after all. I told the dressmaker to make it by a pattern I gave her at the time; instead of that, she did it her own way, and made me look a perfect fright.’

‘How long will you be?’ he inquired, looking rather disappointed.

‘Not long. Do wait and talk to me; come, do, dear.’

Dick sat down. The talking progressed very favourably, amid the snipping and sewing, till about half-past two, at which time his conversation began to be varied by a slight tapping upon his toe with a walking-stick he had cut from the hedge as he came along. Fancy talked and answered him, but sometimes the answers were so negligently given, that it was evident her thoughts lay for the greater part in her lap with the blue dress.

The clock struck three. Dick arose from his seat, walked round the room with his hands behind him, examining all the furniture, then sounded a few notes on the harmonium, then looked inside all the books he could find, then smoothed Fancy's head with his hand. Still the snipping and sewing went on.

The clock struck four. Dick fidgeted about, yawned privately; counted the knots

in the table, yawned publicly; counted the flies on the ceiling, yawned horribly; went into the scullery, and so thoroughly studied the principle upon which the pump was constructed, that he could have delivered a lecture on the subject. Stepping back to Fancy, and finding still that she had not done, he went into her garden and looked at her cabbages and potatoes, and reminded himself that they seemed to him to wear a decidedly feminine aspect; then pulled up several weeds, and came in again. The clock struck five, and still the snipping and sewing went on.

Dick attempted to kill a fly, peeled all the rind off his walking-stick, then threw the stick into the scullery because it was spoilt, produced hideous discords from the harmonium, and accidentally overturned a vase of flowers, the water from which ran in a rill across the table and dribbled to

the floor, where it formed a lake, the shape of which, after the lapse of a few minutes, he began to modify considerably with his foot, till it was like a map of England and Wales.

‘Well, Dick, you needn’t have made quite such a mess.’

‘Well, I needn’t, I suppose.’ He walked up to the blue dress, and looked at it with a rigid gaze. Then an idea seemed to cross his brain.

‘Fancy.’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought you said you were going to wear the gray dress all day to-morrow on your trip to Yalbury, and in the evening too, when I shall be with you, and ask your father for you.’

‘So I am.’

‘And the blue one only on Sunday?’

‘And the blue one Sunday.’

‘Well, dear, I sha’n’t be there Sunday to see it.’

‘No, but such lots of people will be looking at me Sunday, you know, and it did set so badly round the neck.’

‘I never noticed it, and probably nobody else would.’

‘They might.’

‘Then why not wear the gray one on Sunday as well? ’Tis as pretty as the blue one.’

‘I might make the gray one do, certainly. But it isn’t so good; it didn’t cost half so much as this one, and besides, it would be the same I wore Saturday.’

‘Then wear the striped one, dear.’

‘I might.’

‘Or the dark one.’

‘Yes, I might; but I want to wear a fresh one they haven’t seen.’

‘I see, I see,’ said Dick, in a voice in

which the tones of love were decidedly inconvenienced by a considerable emphasis, his thoughts meanwhile running as follows: 'I, the man she loves best in the world, as she says, am to understand that my poor half-holiday is to be lost, because she wants to wear on Sunday a dress there is not the slightest necessity for wearing, simply, in fact, to appear more striking than usual in the eyes of Yalbury young men; and I not there, either.'

'Then there are three dresses good enough for my eyes, but neither is good enough for the youth of Yalbury,' he said.

'No, not that exactly, Dick. Still, you see, I do want—to look pretty to them—there, that's honest. But I sha'n't be much longer.'

'How much?'

'A quarter of an hour.'

‘Very well; I’ll come in in a quarter of an hour.’

‘Why go away?’

‘I may as well.’

He went out, walked down the road, and sat upon a gate. Here he meditated and meditated, and the more he meditated, the more decidedly did he begin to fume, and the more positive was he that his time had been scandalously trifled with by Miss Fancy Day—that, so far from being the simple girl who had never had a sweetheart before, as she had solemnly assured him time after time, she was, if not a flirt, a woman who had had no end of admirers; a girl most certainly too anxious about her dresses; a girl whose feelings, though warm, were not deep; a girl who cared a great deal too much how she appeared in the eyes of other men. ‘What she loves best in the world,’ he thought, with an incipient

spice of his father's grimness, 'are her hair and complexion. What she loves next best, her dresses; what she loves next best, myself, perhaps.'

Suffering great anguish at this disloyalty in himself, and harshness to his darling, yet disposed to persevere in it, a horribly cruel thought crossed his mind. He would not call for her, as he had promised, at the end of a quarter of an hour! Yes, it would be a punishment she well deserved! Although the best part of the afternoon had been wasted, he would go nutting as he had intended, and go by himself.

He leaped over the gate, and pushed along the path for nearly two miles, till it sloped up a hill, and entered a hazel copse by a hole like a rabbit's burrow. In he plunged, vanished among the bushes, and in a short time there was no sign of his

existence upon earth, save an occasional rustling of boughs and snapping of twigs in divers points of the wood.

Never man natted as Dick natted that day. He worked like a galley slave. Hour after hour passed away, and still he gathered without ceasing. At last, when the sun had set, and bunches of nuts could not be distinguished from the leaves which nourished them, he shouldered his bag, containing about two pecks of the finest produce of the wood, and which were about as much use to him as two pecks of stones from the road, and strolled along a bridle-path leading into open ground, whistling as he went.

Probably, Miss Fancy Day never before or after stood so low in Mr. Dewy's opinion as on that afternoon. In fact, it is just possible that a few more blue dresses on the Yalbury young men's account would

have clarified Dick's brain entirely, and made him once more a free man.

But Venus had planned other developments, at any rate for the present. The path he pursued passed over a ridge which rose keenly against the western sky, about fifty yards in his van. Here, upon the bright after-glow about the horizon, was now visible an irregular outline, which at first he conceived to be a bush standing a little beyond the line of its neighbours. Then it seemed to move, and as he advanced still farther, there was no doubt that it was a living being of some species or other. The grassy path entirely prevented his footsteps from being heard, and it was not till he was close, that the figure recognised him. Up it sprang, and he was face to face with Fancy.

‘Dick, Dick! O, is it you, Dick!’

‘Yes, Fancy,’ said Dick, in a rather repentant tone, and lowering his nuts.

. She ran up to him, flung her parasol on the grass, put her little head against his breast, and then there began a narrative, disjointed by such a hysterical weeping as was never surpassed for intensity in the whole history of love.

‘O Dick,’ she sobbed out, ‘where have you been, away from me! O, I have suffered agony, and thought you would never come any more! ’Tis cruel, Dick; no ’t isn’t, it is justice! I’ve been walking miles and miles up and down this wood, trying to find you, till I was wearied and worn out, and I could walk no farther. O Dick, directly you were gone, I thought I had offended you, and I put down the dress; ’t isn’t finished now, Dick, and I never will finish it, and I’ll wear an old one Sunday! Yes,

Dick, I will, because I don't care what I wear when you are not by my side—ah, you think I do, but I don't!—and I ran after you, and I saw you go up the hill and not look back once, and then you plunged in, and I after you; but I was too far behind. O, I did wish the horrid bushes had been cut down, so that I could see your dear shape again! And then I called out to you, and nobody answered, and I was afraid to call very loud, lest anybody else should hear me. Then I kept wandering and wandering about, and it was dreadful misery, Dick. And then I shut my eyes and fell to picturing you looking at some other woman, very pretty and nice, but with no affection or truth in her at all, and then imagined you saying to yourself, “ Ah, she's as good as Fancy, for Fancy told me a story, and was a flirt, and cared for herself more than me, so now I'll have this one for

my sweetheart." O, you won't, will you, Dick, for I do love you so!

It is scarcely necessary to add that Dick renounced his freedom there and then, and kissed her ten times over, and promised that no pretty woman of the kind alluded to should ever engross his thoughts; in short, that though he had been vexed with her, all such vexation was past, and that henceforth and for ever it was simply Fancy or death for him. And then they set about proceeding homewards, very slowly on account of Fancy's weariness, she leaning upon his shoulder, and in addition receiving support from his arm round her waist; though she had sufficiently recovered from her desperate condition to sing to him 'Why are you wandering here, I pray?' during the latter part of their walk. Nor is it necessary to describe in detail how the bag of nuts was quite forgotten until three

days later, when it was found by an under-keeper and restored empty to Mrs. Dewy, her initials being marked thereon in red cotton; and how she puzzled herself till her head ached, upon the question of how on earth her meal-bag could have got into Mellstock copse.

CHAPTER II.

HONEY-TAKING, AND AFTERWARDS.

SATURDAY evening saw Dick Dewy journeying on foot to Yalbury Wood, according to the arrangement with Fancy.

The landscape was concave, and at the going down of the sun everything suddenly assumed a uniform robe of shade. The evening advanced from sunset to dusk long before Dick's arrival, and his progress during the latter portion of his walk through the trees was indicated by the flutter of terrified birds that had been roosting over the path. And in crossing the glades, masses of hot dry air, that had been formed on the hills

during the day, greeted his cheeks alternately with clouds of damp night air from the valleys. He reached the keeper's house, where the grass-plot and the garden in front appeared light and pale against the unbroken darkness of the grove from which he had emerged, and paused at the garden gate.

He had scarcely been there a minute when he beheld a sort of procession advancing from the door in his front. It consisted first of Enoch the trapper, carrying a spade on his shoulder and a lantern dangling in his hand; then came Mrs. Day, the light of the lantern revealing that she bore in her arms curious objects about a foot long, in the form of Latin crosses (made of lath and brown paper dipped in brimstone,—called matches by bee-fanciers); next came Miss Day, with a shawl thrown over her head; and behind all, in the gloom, Mr. Frederic Shinar.

Dick, in his consternation at finding Shinar present, was at a loss how to proceed, and retired under a tree to collect his thoughts.

‘Here I be, Enoch,’ said a voice; and the procession advancing farther, the lantern’s rays illuminated the figure of Geoffrey, awaiting their arrival beside a row of beehives, in front of the path. Taking the spade from Enoch, he proceeded to dig two holes in the earth beside the hives, the others standing round in a circle, except Mrs. Day, who deposited her matches in the fork of an apple-tree, and returned to the house. The party remaining were now lit up in front by the lantern in their midst, their shadows radiating each way upon the garden-plot like the spokes of a wheel. An apparent embarrassment of Fancy at the presence of Shinar caused a silence in the assembly, during which the preliminaries of execution were

arranged, the matches fixed, the stake kindled, the two hives placed over the two holes, and the earth stopped round the edges. Geoffrey then stood erect, and rather more, to straighten his backbone after the digging.

‘They were a peculiar family,’ said Mr. Shinar, regarding the hives reflectively.

Geoffrey nodded.

‘Those holes will be the grave of thousands!’ said Fancy. ‘I think ’tis rather a cruel thing to do.’

Her father shook his head. ‘No,’ he said, tapping the hives to shake the dead bees from their cells, ‘if you suffocate ’em this way, they only die once: if you fumigate ’em in the new way, they come to life again, and so the pangs o’ death be twice upon ’em.’

‘I incline to Fancy’s notion,’ said Mr. Shinar, laughing lightly.

‘The proper way to take honey, so that the bees be neither starved nor murdered,

is not so much an amusing as a puzzling matter,' said the keeper steadily.

'I should like never to take it from them,' said Fancy.

'But 'tis the money,' said Enoch musingly. 'For without money man is a shadder!'

The lantern-light had disturbed several bees that had escaped from hives destroyed some days earlier, and who were now getting a living as marauders about the doors of other hives. Several flew round the head and neck of Geoffrey; then darted upon him with an irritated bizz.

Enoch threw down the lantern, and ran off and pushed his head into a currant bush; Fancy scudded up the path; and Mr. Shinar floundered away helter-skelter among the cabbages. Geoffrey stood his ground unmoved, and firm as a rock. Fancy was the first to return, followed by Enoch picking

up the lantern. Mr. Shinar still remained invisible.

‘Have the craters stung ye?’ said Enoch to Geoffrey.

‘No, not much—only a little here and there,’ he said with leisurely solemnity, shaking one bee out of his shirt sleeve, pulling another from among his hair, and two or three more from his neck. The others looked on during this proceeding with a complacent sense of being out of it,—much as a European nation in a state of internal commotion is watched by its neighbours.

‘Are those all of them, father?’ said Fancy, when Geoffrey had pulled away five.

‘Almost all,—though I feel a few more sticking into my shoulder and side. Ah! there’s another just begun again upon my backbone. You lively young martels, how did you get inside there? However, they can’t sting me many times more, poor

things, for they must be getting weak. They may as well stay in me till bedtime now, I suppose.'

As he himself was the only person affected by this arrangement, it seemed satisfactory enough; and after a noise of feet kicking against cabbages in a blundering progress among them, the voice of Mr. Shinar was heard from the darkness in that direction.

'Is all quite safe again?'

No answer being returned to this query, he apparently assumed that he might venture forth, and gradually drew near the lantern again. The hives were now removed from their position over the holes, one being handed to Enoch to carry indoors, and one being taken by Geoffrey himself.

'Bring hither the lantern, Fancy: the spade can bide.'

Geoffrey and Enoch then went towards

the house, leaving Shinar and Fancy standing side by side on the garden-plot.

‘Allow me,’ said Shinar, stooping for the lantern and seizing it at the same time with Fancy.

‘I can carry it,’ said Fancy, religiously repressing all inclination to trifle. She had thoroughly considered that subject after the tearful explanation of the bird-catching adventure to Dick, and had decided that it would be dishonest in her, as an engaged young woman, to trifle with men’s eyes and hands any more. Finding that Shinar still retained his hold of the lantern, she relinquished it, and he, having found her retaining it, also let go. The lantern fell, and was extinguished. Fancy moved on.

‘Where is the path?’ said Mr. Shinar.

‘Here,’ said Fancy. ‘Your eyes will get used to the dark in a minute or two.’

‘Till that time will ye lend me your hand?’

Fancy gave him the extreme tips of her fingers, and they stepped from the plot into the path.

‘You don’t accept attentions very freely.’

‘It depends upon who offers them.’

‘A fellow like me, for instance.’

A dead silence.

‘Well, what do you say, Missie?’

‘It then depends upon how they are offered.’

‘Not wildly, and yet not indifferently; not intentionally, and yet not by chance; not actively nor idly; quickly nor slowly.’

‘How then?’ said Fancy.

‘Coolly and practically,’ he said. ‘How would that kind of love be taken?’

‘Not anxiously, and yet not carelessly; neither quickly nor slowly; neither redly

nor palely; not religiously nor yet quite wickedly.'

'Well, how?'

'Not at all.'

Geoffrey Day's storehouse at the back of his dwelling was hung with bunches of dried horehound, mint, and sage; brown-paper bags of thyme and lavender; and long ropes of clean onions. On shelves were spread large red and yellow apples, and choice selections of early potatoes for seed next year;—vulgar crowds of commoner kind lying beneath in heaps. A few empty beehives were clustered around a nail in one corner, under which stood two or three barrels of new cider of the first crop, each bubbling and squirting forth from the yet open bunghole.

Fancy was now kneeling beside the two inverted hives, one of which rested against her lap, for convenience in operating upon

the contents. She thrust her sleeves above her elbows, and inserted her small pink hand edgewise between each white lobe of honeycomb, performing the act so adroitly and gently as not to unseal a single cell. Then cracking the piece off at the crown of the hive by a slight backward and forward movement, she lifted each portion as it was loosened into a large blue platter, placed on a bench at her side.

‘Bother them little martels!’ said Geoffrey, who was holding the light to her, and giving his back an uneasy twist. ‘I really think I may so well go indoors and take ’em out, poor things! for they won’t let me alone. There’s two a-stinging wi’ all their might now. I’m sure I wonder their strength can last so long.’

‘All right, friend; I’ll hold the candle whilst you are gone,’ said Mr. Shinar, leisurely taking the light, and allowing Geof-

frey to depart, which he did with his usual long paces.

He could hardly have gone round to the cottage-door when other footsteps were heard approaching the outhouse; the tip of a finger appeared in the hole through which the wood latch was lifted, and Dick Dewy came in, having been all this time walking up and down the wood, vainly waiting for Shinar's departure.

Fancy looked up and welcomed him rather confusedly. Shinar grasped the candlestick more firmly, and, lest doing this in silence should not imply to Dick with sufficient force that he was quite at home and cool, he sang invincibly,

“ ‘King Arthur he had three sons.’ ”

‘Father here?’ said Dick.

‘Indoors, I think,’ said Fancy, looking pleasantly at him.

Dick surveyed the scene, and did not

seem inclined to hurry off just at that moment. Shinar went on singing,

‘ “The miller was drown’d in his pond,
The weaver was hung in his yarn,
And the d— ran away with the little tailor,
With the broadcloth under his arm.” ’

‘ That’s a terrible crippled rhyme, if that’s your rhyme!’ said Dick, with a grain of superciliousness in his tone, and elevating his nose an inch or thereabout.

‘ It’s no use your complaining to me about the rhyme!’ said Mr. Shinar. ‘ You must go to the man that made it.’

Fancy by this time had acquired confidence.

‘ Taste a bit, Mr. Dewy,’ she said, holding up to him a small circular piece of honeycomb that had been the last in the row of lobes, and remaining still on her knees, and flinging back her head to look in his face; ‘ and then I’ll taste a bit too.’

‘And I, if you please,’ said Mr. Shinar. Nevertheless the farmer looked superior, as if he could even now hardly join the trifling from very importance of station; and after receiving the honeycomb from Fancy, he turned it over in his hand till the cells began to be crushed, and the liquid honey ran down from his fingers in a thin string.

Suddenly a faint cry from Fancy caused them to gaze at her.

‘What’s the matter, dear?’ said Dick.

‘It is nothing, but O-o! a bee has stung the inside of my lip! He was in one of the cells I was eating!’

‘We must keep down the swelling, or it may be serious!’ said Shinar, stepping up and kneeling beside her. ‘Let me see it.’

‘No, no!’

‘Just let *me* see it,’ said Dick, kneeling on the other side; and after some hesitation she pressed down her lip with one finger to

show the place. 'I hope 'twill soon be better. I don't mind a sting in ordinary places, but it is so bad upon your lip,' she added, with tears in her eyes, and writhing a little from the pain.

Shinar held the light above his head and pushed his face close to Fancy's, as if the lip had been shown exclusively to himself, upon which Dick pushed closer, as if Shinar were not there at all.

'It is swelling,' said Dick to her right aspect.

'It isn't swelling,' said Shinar to her left aspect.

'Is it dangerous on the lip?' cried Fancy. 'I know it is dangerous on the tongue.'

'O no, not dangerous!' answered Dick.

'Rather dangerous,' had answered Shinar simultaneously.

'It doesn't hurt me so much now,' said Fancy, turning again to the hives.

‘Hartshorn and oil is a good thing to put to it, Miss Day,’ said Shinar with great concern.

‘Sweet oil and hartshorn I’ve found to be a good thing to cure stings, Miss Day,’ said Dick with greater concern.

‘We have some mixed indoors; would you kindly run and get it for me?’ she said.

Now, whether by inadvertence, or whether by mischievous intention, the individuality of the *you* was so carelessly denoted that both Dick and Shinar sprang to their feet like twin acrobats, and marched abreast to the door; both seized the latch and lifted it, and continued marching on, shoulder to shoulder, in the same manner to the dwelling-house. Not only so, but entering the room, they marched as before straight up to Mrs. Day’s chair, letting the door in the old oak partition slam so forcibly, that the rows of pewter on the dresser rang like a bell.

‘Mrs. Day, Fancy has stung her lip, and wants you to give me the hartshorn, please,’ said Mr. Shinar, very close to Mrs. Day’s face.

‘O, Mrs. Day, Fancy has asked me to bring out the hartshorn, please, because she has stung her lip!’ said Dick, a little closer to Mrs. Day’s face.

‘Well, men alive! that’s no reason why you should eat me, I suppose!’ said Mrs. Day, drawing back.

She searched in the corner-cupboard, produced the bottle, and began to dust the cork, the rim, and every other part very carefully, Dick’s hand and Shinar’s hand waiting side by side.

‘Which is head man?’ said Mrs. Day. ‘Now, don’t come mumbudgeting so close again. Which is head man?’

Neither spoke; and the bottle was inclined towards Shinar. Shinar, as a high-

class man, would not look in the least triumphant, and turned to go off with it as Geoffrey came downstairs after the search in his linen for concealed bees.

‘O—that you, Master Dewy?’

Dick assured the keeper that it was; and the young man then determined upon a bold stroke for the attainment of his end, forgetting that the worst of bold strokes is the disastrous consequences they involve if they fail.

‘I’ve come o’ purpose to speak to you very particularly, Mr. Day,’ he said, with a crushing emphasis intended for the ears of Mr. Shinar, who was vanishing round the door-post at that moment.

‘Well, I’ve been forced to go upstairs and unrind myself, and shake some bees out o’ me,’ said Geoffrey, walking slowly towards the open door, and standing on the threshold. ‘The young rascals got

into my shirt and wouldn't be quiet no-how.'

Dick followed him to the door.

'I've come to speak a word to you,' he repeated, looking out at the pale mist creeping up from the gloom of the valley. 'You may perhaps guess what it is about.'

The keeper lowered his hands into the extreme depths of his pockets, twirled his eyes, balanced himself on his toes, looked perpendicularly downward as if his glance were a plumb-line, then scrupulously horizontal, gradually collecting together the cracks that lay about his face till they were all in the neighbourhood of his eyes.

'Maybe I don't know,' he replied.

Dick said nothing; and the stillness was disturbed only by some small bird that was being killed by an owl in the adjoining copse, whose cry passed into the silence without mingling with it.

‘I’ve left my hat in the chammer,’ said Geoffrey; ‘wait while I step up and get en.’

‘I’ll be in the garden,’ said Dick.

He went round by a side wicket into the garden, and Geoffrey went upstairs. It was the custom in Mellstock and its vicinity to discuss matters of pleasure and ordinary business inside the house, and to reserve the garden for very important affairs: a custom which, as is supposed, originated in the desirability of getting away at such times from the other members of the family, when there was only one room for living in, though it was now quite as frequently practised by those who suffered from no such limitation to the size of their domiciles.

The keeper’s form appeared in the dusky garden, and Dick walked towards him. The keeper paused, turned, and leant over the

rail of a piggery that stood on the left of the path, upon which Dick did the same; and they both contemplated a whitish shadowy form that was moving about and grunting among the straw of the interior.

‘I’ve come to ask for Fancy,’ said Dick.

‘I’d as lief you hadn’t.’

‘Why should that be, Mr. Day?’

‘Because it makes me say that you’ve come to ask for what ye be’n’t likely to have. Have ye come for anything else?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Then I’ll just tell ye you’ve come on a very foolish errand. D’ye know what her mother was?’

‘No.’

‘A governess in a county family, who was foolish enough to marry the keeper of the same establishment. D’ye think Fancy picked up her good manners, the smooth turn of her tongue, her musical skill, and

her knowledge of books, in a homely hole like this?’

‘No.’

‘D’ye know where?’

‘No.’

‘Well, when I went a-wandering after her mother’s death, she lived with her aunt, who kept a boarding-school, till her aunt married Lawyer Green—a man as sharp as a needle—and the school was broken up. Did ye know that then she went to the training-school, and that her name stood first among the Queen’s scholars of her year?’

‘I’ve heard so.’

‘And that when she sat for her certificate as Government teacher, she had the highest of the first class?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, and do ye know what I live in such a miserly way for when I’ve got

enough to do without it, and why I make her work as a schoolmistress instead of living here?’

‘No.’

‘That if any gentleman, who sees her to be his equal in polish, should want to marry her, and she want to marry him, he sha’n’t be superior to her in pocket. Now do ye think after this that you be good enough for her?’

‘No.’

‘Then good-night t’ye, Master Dewy.’

‘Good-night, Mr. Day.’

Modest Dick’s reply had faltered upon his tongue, and he turned away wondering at his presumption in asking for a woman whom he had seen from the beginning to be so superior to him.

CHAPTER III.

FANCY IN THE RAIN.

THE next scene is a tempestuous afternoon in the following month, and Fancy Day is discovered walking from her father's home towards Mellstock.

A single vast gray cloud covered all the country, from which the small rain and mist had just begun to blow down in wavy sheets, alternately thick and thin. The trees of the old brown plantation writhed like miserable men as the air wended its way swiftly among them: the lowest portions of their trunks, that had

hardly ever been known to move, were visibly rocked by the fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as when a strong man is seen to shed tears. Low-hanging boughs went up and down ; high and erect boughs went to and fro ; the blasts being so irregular, and divided into so many cross-currents, that neighbouring branches of the same tree swept the skies in independent motions, crossed each other, passed, or became entangled. Across the open spaces flew flocks of green and yellowish leaves, which, after travelling a long distance from their parent trees, reached the ground, and lay there with their under-sides upward.

As the rain and wind increased, and Fancy's bonnet-ribbons leapt more and more snappishly against her chin, she paused to consider her latitude, and the distance to a place of shelter. The nearest

house was Elizabeth Endorfield's, whose cottage and garden stood at the junction of the lane with the high road. Fancy hastened onward, and in five minutes entered a gate, which shed upon her toes a flood of water-drops as she opened it.

'Come in, chiel!' a voice exclaimed, before Fancy had knocked: a promptness that would have surprised her, had she not known that Mrs. Endorfield was an exceedingly and exceptionally sharp woman in the use of her eyes and ears.

Fancy went in and sat down. Elizabeth was paring potatoes for her husband's supper.

Scrape, scrape, scrape; then a toss, and splash went a potato into a bucket of water.

Now, as Fancy listlessly noted these proceedings of the dame, she began to reconsider an old subject that lay uppermost

in her heart. Since the interview between her father and Dick, the days had been melancholy days for her. Geoffrey's firm opposition to the notion of Dick as a son-in-law was more than she had expected. She had frequently seen her lover since that time, it is true, and had loved him more for the opposition than she would have otherwise dreamt of doing—which was a happiness of a certain kind. Yet, though love is thus an end in itself, it must be believed to be the means to another end if it is to assume the rosy hues of an unalloyed pleasure. And such a belief Fancy and Dick were emphatically denied just now.

Elizabeth Endorfield had a repute among women which was in its nature something between distinction and notoriety. It was founded on the following items of character. She was shrewd and penetrating; her house

stood in a lonely place ; she never went to church ; she always retained her bonnet indoors ; and she had a pointed chin. Thus far her attributes were distinctly Satanic ; and those who looked no further called her, in plain terms, a witch. But she was not gaunt, nor ugly in the upper part of her face, nor particularly strange in manner ; so that, when her more intimate acquaintances spoke of her, the term was softened, and she became simply a Deep Body, who was as long-headed as she was high. It may be stated that Elizabeth belonged to a class of people who were gradually losing their mysterious characteristics under the administration of the young vicar ; though, during the long reign of Mr. Grinham, the parish of Mellstock had proved extremely favourable to the growth of witches.

While Fancy was revolving all this in her mind, and putting it to herself whe-

ther it was worth while to tell her troubles to Elizabeth, and ask her advice in getting out of them, the witch spoke.

‘You are down—proper down,’ she said suddenly, dropping another potato into the bucket.

Fancy took no notice.

‘About your young man.’

Fancy reddened. Elizabeth seemed to be watching her thoughts. Really, one would almost think she must have the powers people ascribed to her.

‘Father not in the humour for’t, hey?’ Another potato was finished and flung in. ‘Ah, I know about it. Little birds tell me things that people don’t dream of my knowing.’

Fancy was desperate about Dick, and here was a chance—O, such a wicked chance!—of getting help; but what was goodness beside love!

‘I wish you’d tell me how to put him in the humour for it?’ she said.

‘That I could soon do,’ said the witch quietly.

‘Really? O, do; anyhow—I don’t care—so that it is done! How could I do it, Mrs. Endorfield?’

‘Nothing so mighty wonderful in it.’

‘Well, but how?’

‘By witchery, of course!’ said Elizabeth.

‘No!’ said Fancy.

‘’Tis, I assure ye. Didn’t you ever hear I was a witch?’

‘Well,’ said Fancy hesitatingly, ‘I have heard you called so.’

‘And you believed it?’

‘I can’t say that I did exactly believe it, for ’tis very horrible and wicked; but, O, how I do wish it was possible for you to be one!’

‘So I am. And I’ll tell ye how to bewitch your father, to let you marry Dick Dewy.’

‘Will it hurt him, poor thing?’

‘Hurt who?’

‘Father.’

‘No; the charm is worked by common sense, and the spell can only be broke by your acting stupidly.’

Fancy looked rather perplexed, and Elizabeth went on:

‘This fear of Lizz—whatever ’tis—
By great and small;
She makes pretence to common sense,
And that’s all.

You must do it like this.’ The witch laid down her knife and potato, and then poured into Fancy’s ear a long and detailed list of directions, glancing up from the corner of her eye into Fancy’s face with an expression of sinister humour.

Fancy's face brightened, clouded, rose and sank, as the narrative proceeded. 'There,' said Elizabeth at length, stooping for the knife and another potato, 'do that, and you'll have him by-long and by-late, my dear.'

'And do it I will!' said Fancy.

She then turned her attention to the external world once more. The rain continued as usual, but the wind had abated considerably during the discourse. Judging that it was now possible to keep an umbrella erect, she pulled her hood again over her bonnet, bade the witch good-bye, and went her way.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPELL.

MRS. ENDORFIELD'S advice was duly followed.

'I be proper sorry that your daughter isn't so well as she might be,' said a Mellstock man to Geoffrey one morning.

'But is there anything in it?' said Geoffrey uneasily. He shifted his hat slightly to the right. 'I can't understand the report. She didn't complain to me at all, when I seed her.'

'No appetite at all, they say.'

Geoffrey called at the school that after-

noon. Fancy welcomed him as usual, and asked him to stay and take tea with her.

‘I be’n’t much for tea, this time o’ day,’ he said, but stayed.

During the meal he watched her narrowly. And to his great consternation, discovered the following unprecedented change in the healthy girl—that she cut herself only a diaphanous slice of bread-and-butter, and laying it on her plate, passed the meal in breaking it into pieces, but eating no more than about one-tenth of the slice. Geoffrey hoped she would say something about Dick, and finish up by weeping, as she had done after the decision against him a few days subsequent to the interview in the garden. But nothing was said, and in due time Geoffrey departed again for Yalbury Wood.

‘’Tis to be hoped poor Miss Fancy will be able to keep on her school,’ said Geof-

frey's man Enoch to Geoffrey the following week, as they were shovelling up ant-hills in the wood.

Geoffrey stuck in the shovel, swept seven or eight ants from his sleeve, and killed another that was prowling round his ear, then looked perpendicularly into the earth, waiting for Enoch to say more. 'Well, why shouldn't she?' said the keeper at last.

'The baker told me yesterday,' continued Enoch, shaking out another emmet that had run merrily up his thigh, 'that the bread he've left at that there school-house this last month would starve any mouse in the three creations; that 'twould so. And afterwards I had a pint o' small at the Old Souls, and there I heard more.'

'What might that ha' been?'

'That she used to have half a pound o' the best rolled butter a week, regular as clockwork, from Dairyman Quenton's; but

now the same quantity d'last her three weeks, and then 'tis thoughted she throws it away sour.'

'Finish doing the emmets, and carry the bag home-along.' The keeper resumed his gun, tucked it under his arm, and went on without whistling to the dogs, who however followed, with a bearing meant to imply that they did not expect any such attentions when their master was reflecting.

On Saturday morning a note came from Fancy. He was not to trouble about sending her the couple of early young rabbits, as was intended, because she feared she should not want them. Later in the day, Geoffrey went to Casterbridge, and called upon the butcher who served Fancy with fresh meat, which was put down to her father's account.

'I've called to pay up our little bill,

naighbour Sabley, and you can gie me the chiel's account at the same time.'

Mr. Sabley turned round three quarters of a circle in the midst of a heap of joints, altered the expression of his face from meat to money, went into a little office consisting only of a door and a window, looked very vigorously into a book which possessed length but no breadth; and then, seizing a piece of paper and scribbling thereupon, handed the bill.

Probably it was the first time in the history of commercial transactions that the quality of shortness in a butcher's bill was a cause of tribulation to the debtor. 'Why this isn't all she've had in a whole month!' said Geoffrey.

'Every mossel,' said the butcher — ' (now, Dan, take that leg and shoulder to Mrs. White's, and this eleven pound here to Mr. Martin's)—you've been trating her

to smaller joints lately, to my thinking, Mr. Day?’

‘Only two or three little scam rabbits this last week, as I be alive—I wish I had.’

‘Well, my wife said to me—(Dan! not too much, not too much at a time; better go twice)—my wife said to me as she posted up the books: “Sabley,” she ses, “Miss Day must have been affronted this summer during that hot muggy weather that spoilt so much for us; for depend upon’t,” she ses, “she’ve been trying Joe Grimmett unknown to us: see her account else.” ’Tis little, of course, at the best of times, being only for one, but now ’tis next kin to nothing.’

‘I’ll inquire,’ said Geoffrey despondingly.

He returned by way of Mellstock, and called upon Fancy, in fulfilment of a promise. It being Saturday, the children were enjoying a holiday, and on entering the residence Fancy was nowhere to be seen.

Nan, the charwoman, was sweeping the kitchen.

‘Where’s my da’ter?’ said the keeper.

‘Well, you see she was tired with the week’s work, and this morning she said, “Nan, I sha’n’t get up till the evening.” You see, Mr. Day, if people don’t eat, they can’t work; and as she’ve gie’d up eating, she must gie up working.’

‘Have ye carried up any dinner to her?’

‘No; she don’t want any. There, we all know that such things don’t come without good reason—not that I wish to say anything about a broken heart, or anything of the kind.’

Geoffrey’s own heart felt inconveniently large just then. He went to the staircase and ascended to his daughter’s door.

‘Fancy!’

‘Come in, father.’

To see a person in bed from any cause whatever, on a fine afternoon, is depressing enough; and here was his only child Fancy, not only in bed, but looking very pale. Geoffrey was visibly disturbed.

‘Fancy, I didn’t expect to see thee here, chiel,’ he said. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘I’m not well, father.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Because I think of things.’

‘What things can you have to think o’ so martel much?’

‘You know, father.’

‘You think I’ve been cruel to thee in saying that that penniless Dick o’ thine sha’n’t marry thee, I suppose?’

No answer.

‘Well, you know, Fancy, I do it for the best, and he isn’t good enough for thee. You know that well enough.’ Here he again looked at her as she lay. ‘Well,

Fancy, I can't let my only chiel die; and if you can't live without en, you must ha' en, I suppose.'

'O, I don't want him like that; all against your will, and everything so disobedient!' sighed the invalid.

'No, no; 't isn't against my will. My wish is, now I d'see how 'tis hurten thee to live without en, that he shall marry thee as soon as we've considered a little. That's my wish flat and plain, Fancy. There, never cry, my little maid! You ought to ha' cried afore; no need o' crying now 'tis all over. Well, howsoever, try to stap over and see me and mother-law to-morrow, and ha' a bit of dinner wi' us.'

'And—Dick too?'

'Ay, Dick too, 'far's I know.'

'And *when* do you think you'll have considered, father, and he may marry me?' she coaxed.

‘Well, there, say next Midsummer; that’s not a day too long to wait.’

On leaving the school, Geoffrey went to the tranter’s. Old William opened the door.

‘Is your grandson Dick in ’ithin, William?’

‘No, not just now, Geoffrey. Though he’ve been at home a good deal lately.’

‘O, how’s that?’

‘What wi’ one thing, and what wi’ ’tother, he’s all in a mope, as m’t be said. Don’t seem the feller ’a used to. Ay, ’a will sit studding and thinking as if ’a were going to turn chapel-member, and then ’a don’t do nothing but traypsing and wamb-ling about. Used to be such a chatty feller, too, Dick did; and now ’a don’t spak at all. But won’t ye stap inside? Reuben will be home soon, ’a b’lieve.’

‘No, thank you, I can’t stay now. Will

ye just ask Dick if he'll do me the kindness to stap over to Yalbury to-morrow with my da'ter Fancy, if she's well enough? I don't like her to come by herself, now she's not so terrible topping in health.'

'So I've heard. Ay, sure, I'll tell'n without fail.'

CHAPTER V.

AFTER GAINING HER POINT.

THE visit to Geoffrey passed off as delightfully as a visit might have been expected to pass off when it was the first day of smooth experience in a hitherto obstructed love-course. And then came a series of several happy days, of the same undisturbed serenity. Dick could court her when he chose; stay away when he chose,—which was never; walk with her by winding streams and waterfalls and autumn scenery till dews and twilight sent them home. And thus they drew near the day of the Harvest Thanksgiving, which was also the

time chosen for opening the organ in Mellstock Church.

It chanced that Dick on that very day was called away from Mellstock. A young acquaintance had died of consumption at Stoneley, a neighbouring village, on the previous Monday, and Dick, in fulfilment of a long-standing promise, was to assist in carrying him to the grave. When, on Tuesday, Dick went towards the school to acquaint Fancy of the fact, it is difficult to say whether his own disappointment, at being denied the sight of her triumphant *début* as organist, was greater than his vexation that his pet should on this great occasion be deprived of the pleasure of his presence. However, the intelligence was communicated. She bore it as she best could, not without many expressions of regret, and convictions that her performance would be nothing to her now.

Just before eleven o'clock on Sunday he set out upon his sad errand. The funeral was to be immediately after the morning service, and as there were four good miles to walk, it became necessary to start comparatively early. Half an hour later would certainly have answered his purpose quite as well, yet nothing would content his ardent mind but that he must go a mile out of his way, in the direction of the school, in the hope of getting a glimpse of his Love as she started for church.

Striking into the path between the church and the school, he proceeded towards the latter spot, and arrived opposite her door as his goddess emerged.

If ever a woman looked a divinity, Fancy Day appeared one that morning as she floated down those school steps, in the form of a nebulous collection of colours inclining to blue. With an audacity unparalleled in

the whole history of schoolmistresses — partly owing, no doubt, to papa's respectable accumulation of cash, which rendered her profession not altogether one of necessity— she had actually donned a hat and feather, and lowered her hitherto plainly looped-up hair, which now fell about her shoulders in a profusion of curls. Poor Dick was astonished: he had never seen her look so distractingly beautiful before, save on Christmas-eve, when her hair was in the same luxuriant condition of freedom. But his first burst of delighted surprise was followed by less comfortable feelings, as soon as his brain recovered its power to think.

Fancy had blushed;—was it with confusion? She had also involuntarily pressed back her curls. She had not expected him.

‘Fancy, you didn't know me for a moment in my funeral clothes, did you?’

‘Good-morning, Dick—no, really I didn’t recognise you for an instant.’

He looked again at the gay tresses and hat. ‘You’ve never dressed so charmingly before, dearest.’

‘I like to hear you praise me in that way, Dick,’ she said, smiling archly. ‘It is meat and drink to a woman. Do I look nice really?’

‘Fancy,—fie!—you know it. Did you remember,—I mean didn’t you remember about my going away to-day?’

‘Well, yes, I did, Dick; but, you know, I wanted to look well;—forgive me.’

‘Yes, darling; yes, of course,—there’s nothing to forgive. No, I was only thinking that when we talked on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday about my absence to-day, and I regretted it so, you said, Fancy, so did you regret it, and almost cried, and said it would be no plea-

sure to you to be the attraction of the church to-day, since I could not be there.'

'My dear one, neither will it be so much pleasure to me. . . . But I do take a little delight in my life, I suppose,' she pouted.

'Apart from mine?'

She looked at him with perplexed eyes. 'I know you are vexed with me, Dick, and it is because the first Sunday I have curls and a hat and feather since I have been here happens to be the very day you are away and won't be with me. Yes, say it is, for that is it! And you think that all this week I ought to have remembered you wouldn't be here, and not have cared to be better dressed than usual. Yes, you do, Dick, and it is rather unkind!'

'No, no,' said Dick earnestly and simply, 'I didn't think so badly of you as that. I only thought that, if you had been going away, I shouldn't have adopted new attrac-

tions for the eyes of other people. But then of course you and I are different, naturally.'

'Well, perhaps we are.'

'Whatever will the vicar say, Fancy?'

'I don't fear what he says in the least!' she answered proudly. 'But he won't say anything of the sort you think. No, no.'

'He can hardly have conscience to, indeed.'

'Now come, you say, Dick, that you quite forgive me, for I must go,' she said with sudden gaiety, and skipped backwards into the porch. 'Come here, sir!—say you forgive me, and then you shall kiss me;—you never have yet when I have worn curls, you know. Yes, in the very middle of my mouth, where you want to so much,—yes, you may.'

Dick followed her into the inner corner, where he was not slow in availing himself of the privilege offered.

‘Now that’s a treat for you, isn’t it?’ she continued. ‘Good-bye, or I shall be late. Come and see me to-morrow: you’ll be tired to-night.’

Thus they parted, and Fancy proceeded to the church. The organ stood on one side of the chancel, close to and under the immediate eye of the vicar when he was in the pulpit, and also in full view of the whole congregation. Here she sat down, for the first time in such a conspicuous position, her seat having previously been in a remote spot in the aisle. ‘Good heavens—disgraceful! Curls and a hat and feather!’ said the daughters of the small gentry, who had either only curly hair without a hat and feather, or a hat and feather without curling hair. ‘A bonnet for church always!’ said sober matrons.

That Mr. Maybold was conscious of her presence close beside him during his ser-

mon; that he was not at all angry at her development of costume; that he admired her, she perceived. But she did not see that he loved her during that sermon-time as he had never loved a woman before; that her proximity was a strange delight to him; and that he gloried in her musical success that morning in a spirit quite beyond a mere cleric's glory at the inauguration of a new order of things.

The old choir, with humbled hearts, no longer took their seats in the gallery as heretofore (which was now given up to the school-children who were not singers, and a pupil-teacher), but were scattered about with their wives in different parts of the church. Having nothing to do with conducting the service for almost the first time in their lives, they all felt awkward, out of place, abashed, and inconvenienced by their hands. The tranter had proposed that they

should stay away to-day and go nutting, but grandfather William would not hear of such a thing for a moment. 'No,' he replied reproachfully, and quoted a verse: "Though this has come upon us, let not our hearts be turned back, or our steps go out of the way." So they stood and watched the curls of hair trailing down the back of the successful rival, and the waving of her feather, as she swayed her head. After a few timid notes and uncertain touches her playing became markedly correct, and towards the end full and free. But, whether from prejudice or unbiassed judgment, the venerable body of musicians could not help thinking that the simpler notes they had been wont to bring forth were more in keeping with the simplicity of their old church than the crowded chords and interludes it was her pleasure to produce.

CHAPTER VI.

INTO TEMPTATION.

THE day was done, and Fancy was again in the school-house. About five o'clock it began to rain, and in rather a dull frame of mind she wandered into the schoolroom, for want of something better to do. She was thinking — of her lover Dick Dewy? not precisely. Of how weary she was of living alone; how unbearable it would be to return to Yalbury under the rule of her strange-tempered step-mother; that it was far better to be married to anybody than do that; that eight or nine long months had yet to

be lived through ere the wedding could take place.

At the end of the room was a high window, upon the sill of which she could sit by first mounting a desk and using it as a footstool. As the evening advanced, here she perched herself, as was her custom on such wet and gloomy occasions, put on a light shawl and bonnet, opened the window, and looked out at the rain.

The window overlooked a field and footpath across it, and it was the position from which she used to survey the crown of Dick's hat in the early days of their acquaintance and meetings. Not a living soul was now visible anywhere; the rain kept all people indoors who were not forced abroad by necessity, and necessity was less importunate on Sundays than during the week.

Sitting here and thinking again—of her lover, or of the sensation she had created*

at church that day?—well, it is unknown—thinking and thinking she saw a dark masculine figure arising into distinctness at the farther end of the path—a man without an umbrella. Nearer and nearer he came, and she perceived that he was in deep mourning, and then that it was Dick. Yes, in the fondness and foolishness of his young heart, after walking four miles in a drizzling rain without overcoat or umbrella, and in face of a remark from his love that he was not to come because he would be tired, he had made it his business to wander this mile out of his way again, from sheer love of spending ten minutes in her beloved presence.

‘O Dick, how wet you are!’ she said, as he drew up under the window. ‘Why, your coat shines as if it had been varnished, and your hat—my goodness, there’s a streaming hat!’

‘O, I don’t mind, darling!’ said Dick

cheerfully. 'Wet never hurts me, though I am rather sorry for my best clothes. However, it couldn't be helped; they lent all the umbrellas to the women.'

'And look, there's a nasty patch of something just on your shoulder.'

'Ah, that's japanning; it rubbed off the clamps of poor Jack's coffin when we lowered him from our shoulders upon the bier! I don't care about that, for 'twas the last deed I could do for him; and 'tis hard if you can't afford a coat to an old friend.'

Fancy put her hand to her mouth for half a minute. Underneath the palm of that little hand there existed for that half-minute a little yawn.

'Dick, I don't like you to stand there in the wet. Go home and change your things. Don't stay another minute.'

'One kiss after coming so far,' he pleaded.

'If I can reach, then.'

He looked rather disappointed at not being invited round to the door. She left her seated position and bent herself downwards, but not even by standing on the plinth was it possible for Dick to get his mouth into contact with hers as she held it. By great exertion she might have reached a little lower; but then she would have exposed her head to the rain.

‘Never mind, Dick; kiss my hand,’ she said, flinging it down to him. ‘Now, good-bye.’

‘Good-bye!’

He walked slowly away, turning and turning again to look at her till he was out of sight. During the retreat she said to herself, almost involuntarily, and still conscious of that morning’s triumph,

‘I like Dick, and I love him; but how poor and mean a man looks in the rain, with no umbrella, and wet through!’

As he vanished, she made as if to descend from her seat; but glancing in the other direction she saw another form coming along the same path. It was also that of a man. He, too, was in black from top to toe; but he carried an umbrella.

He drew nearer, and the direction of the rain caused him so to slant his umbrella, that from her height above the ground his head was invisible, as she was also to him. He passed in due time directly beneath her, and in looking down upon the exterior of his umbrella her feminine eyes instinctively perceived it to be of superior silk, and of elegant make. He reached the angle of the building, and Fancy suddenly lost sight of him. Instead of pursuing the straight path, as Dick had done, he had turned sharply round to her own door.

She jumped to the floor, hastily flung off the shawl and bonnet, smoothed and

patted her hair till the curls hung in passable condition, and listened. No knock. Nearly a minute passed, and still there was no knock. Then there arose a soft series of raps, no louder than the tapping of a distant woodpecker, and barely distinct enough to reach her ears. She composed herself and flung open the door.

In the porch stood Mr. Maybold.

There was a warm flush upon his face, and a bright flash in his eyes, which made him look handsomer than she had ever seen him before.

‘ Good-evening, Miss Day.’

‘ Good-evening, Mr. Maybold,’ she said, in a strange state of mind. She had noticed, beyond the ardent hue of his face, that his voice had a singular tremor in it, and that his hand shook like an aspen leaf when he laid his umbrella in the corner of the porch. Without another word being spoken by either

he came into the schoolroom, shut the door, and moved close to her. Once inside, the expression of his face was no more discernible, by reason of the increasing dusk of evening.

‘I want to speak to you,’ he then said; ‘seriously—on a perhaps unexpected subject, but one which is all the world to me—I don’t know what it may be to you, Miss Day.’

No reply.

‘Fancy, I have come to ask you if you will be my wife?’

As a person who has been idly amusing himself with rolling a snowball might start at finding he had set in motion an avalanche, so did Fancy start at these words from the vicar. And in the dead silence which followed them, the breathings of the man and of the woman could be distinctly and separately heard; and there was this

difference between them — his respirations gradually grew quieter and less rapid after the enunciation ; hers, from having been low and regular, increased in quickness and force, till she almost panted.

‘ I cannot, I cannot, Mr. Maybold—I cannot. Don’t ask me!’ she said.

‘ Don’t answer in a hurry!’ he entreated. ‘ And do listen to me. This is no sudden feeling on my part. I have loved you for more than six months! Perhaps my late interest in teaching the children here has not been so single-minded as it seemed. You will understand my motive—like me better, perhaps — for honestly telling you that I have struggled against my emotion continually, because I have thought that it was not well for me to love you! But I resolve to struggle no longer; I have examined the feeling; and the love I bear you is as genuine as that I could bear any wo-

man! I see your great beauty; I respect your natural talents, and the refinement they have brought into your nature—they are quite enough, and more than enough for me! They are equal to anything ever required of the mistress of a quiet parsonage-house—the place in which I shall pass my days, wherever it may be situated. O Fancy, I have watched you, criticised you even severely, brought my feelings to the light of judgment, and still have found them rational, and such as any man might have expected to be inspired with by a woman like you! So there is nothing hurried, secret, or untoward in my desire to make you my wife! Fancy, will you marry me?’

No answer was returned.

‘Don’t refuse; don’t,’ he implored. ‘It would be foolish of you—I mean cruel! Of course we would not live here, Fancy. I

have had for a long time the offer of an exchange of livings with a friend in Yorkshire, but I have hitherto refused on account of my mother. There we would go. Your musical powers shall be still further developed; you shall have whatever piano you like; you shall have anything, Fancy! anything to make you happy—pony-carriage, flowers, birds, pleasant society; yes, you have enough in you for any society, after a few months of travel with me! Will you, Fancy, marry me?’

Another pause ensued, varied only by the surging of the rain against the window-panes, and then Fancy spoke, in a faint and broken voice.

‘Yes, I will,’ she said.

‘God bless you, my own!’ He advanced quickly, and put his arm out to embrace her. She drew back hastily. ‘No, no, not now!’ she said in an agitated whisper.

‘There are things;—but the temptation is, O, too strong, and I can’t resist it; I can’t tell you now, but I must tell you! Don’t, please, don’t come near me now! I want to think. I can scarcely get myself used to the idea of what I have promised yet.’ The next minute she turned to a desk, buried her face in her hands, and burst into a hysterical fit of weeping. ‘O, leave me!’ she sobbed, ‘leave me! O, leave me!’

‘Don’t be distressed; don’t, dearest!’ It was with visible difficulty that he restrained himself from approaching her. ‘You shall tell me at your leisure what it is that grieves you so; I am happy—beyond all measure happy!—at having your simple promise.’

‘And do leave me now!’

‘But I must not, in justice to you, leave for a minute, until you are yourself again.’

‘There then,’ she said, controlling her

emotion, and standing up; 'I am not disturbed now.'

He reluctantly moved towards the door. 'Good-bye!' he murmured tenderly. 'I'll come to-morrow about this time.'

CHAPTER VII.

A CRISIS.

THE next morning the vicar rose early. The first thing he did was to write a long and careful letter to his friend in Yorkshire. Then, partaking of a little breakfast, he crossed the dale and heath in the direction of Casterbridge, bearing his letter in his pocket, that he might post it at the town office, and obviate the loss of one day in its transmission that would have resulted had he left it for the foot-post through the village.

It was a foggy morning, and the trees

shed in noisy water-drops the moisture they had collected from the thick air, an acorn occasionally falling from its cup to the ground, in company with the drippings. In the heath, sheets of spiders'-web, almost opaque with wet, hung in folds over the furze-bushes, and the ferns appeared in every variety of brown, green, and yellow hues.

A low and merry whistling was heard on the other side of the hedge, then the light footsteps of a man going in the same direction as himself. On reaching the gate which divided the two enclosures, the vicar beheld Dick Dewy's open and cheerful face. Dick lifted his hat, and came through the gate into the path the vicar was pursuing.

'Good-morning, Dewy. How well you are looking!' said Mr. Maybold.

'Yes, sir, I am well—quite well! I am

going to Casterbridge now, to get Smart's collar; we left it there Saturday to be repaired.'

'I am going to Casterbridge, so we'll walk together,' the vicar said. Dick gave a hop with one foot to put himself in step with Mr. Maybold, who proceeded: 'I fancy I didn't see you at church yesterday, Dewy. Or were you behind the pier?'

'No: I went to Stoneley. Poor John Dunford chose me to be one of his bearers a long time before he died, and yesterday was the funeral. Of course I couldn't refuse, though I should have liked particularly to have been at home on this occasion.'

'Yes, you should have been. The musical portion of the service was successful—very successful indeed; and what is more to the purpose, no ill-feeling whatever was evinced by any of the members of the

old choir. They joined in the singing with the greatest good-will.'

'Twas natural enough that I should want to be there, I suppose,' said Dick, smiling a private smile; 'considering who the organist was.'

At this the vicar reddened a little, and said, 'Yes, yes,' though not at all comprehending Dick's true meaning, who, as he received no further reply, continued hesitatingly, and with another smile denoting his pride as a lover,

'I suppose you know what I mean, sir? You've heard about me and—Miss Day?'

The red in Maybold's countenance went away: he turned and looked Dick in the face.

'No,' he said constrainedly, 'I've heard nothing whatever about you and Miss Day.'

'Why, she's my sweetheart, and we

are going to be married next Midsummer. We are keeping it rather close just at present, because it is a good many months to wait; but it is her father's wish that we don't marry before, and of course we must submit. But the time will soon slip along.'

'Yes, the time will soon slip along. Time glides away every day—yes.'

Maybold said these words, but he had no idea of what they were. He was conscious of a cold and sickly thrill throughout him; and all he reasoned was this, that the young creature whose graces had intoxicated him into making the most imprudent resolution of his life, was less an angel than a woman.

'You see, sir,' continued the ingenuous Dick, 'twill be better in one sense. I shall by that time be the regular manager of a branch of my father's business, which has very much increased lately, and we

expect next year to keep an extra couple of horses. We've already our eye on one—brown as a berry, neck like a rainbow, fifteen hands, and not a gray hair in her—offered us at twenty-five want a crown. And to keep pace with the times, I have had some cards printed, and I beg leave to hand you one, sir.'

'Certainly,' said the vicar, mechanically taking the card that Dick offered him.

'I turn in here by the river,' said Dick. 'I suppose you go straight up the town?'

'Yes.'

'Good-morning, sir.'

'Good-morning, Dewy.'

Maybold stood still upon the bridge, holding the card as it had been put into his hand, and Dick's footsteps died away. The vicar's first voluntary action was to read the card:—

DEWY AND SON,

Craniers and Hauliers,

MELLSTOCK.

*N.B. Furniture, Coals, Potatoes, Live and Dead Stock,
removed to any distance on the shortest notice.*

Mr. Maybold leant over the parapet of the bridge and looked into the river. He saw — without heeding — how the water came rapidly from beneath the arches, glided down a little steep, then spread itself over a pool in which dace, trout, and minnows sported at ease among the long green locks of weed, that lay heaving and sinking with their roots towards the current. At the end of ten minutes spent leaning thus, he stood erect, drew the letter from his pocket, tore it deliberately into such minute fragments that scarcely two syllables remained in juxtaposition, and sent the whole handful of shreds fluttering into the water. Here he watched

them eddy, dart, and turn, as they were carried downwards towards the ocean and gradually disappeared from his view. Finally he moved off, and pursued his way at a rapid pace towards Mellstock Vicarage.

Nerving himself by a long and intense effort, he sat down in his study and wrote as follows :

‘ Dear Miss Day,—The meaning of your words, “the temptation is too strong,” of your sadness and your tears, has been brought home to me by an accident. I know to-day what I did not know yesterday—that you are not a free woman.

‘ Why did you not tell me—why didn’t you? Did you suppose I knew? No. Had I known, my conduct in coming to you as I did would have been reprehensible.

‘But I don’t chide you! perhaps no blame attaches to you — I can’t tell. Fancy, though my opinion of you is assailed and disturbed in a way which cannot be expressed, I love you still, and my word to you holds good yet. But will you, in justice to an honest man who relies upon your word to him, consider whether, under the circumstances, you can honourably forsake him?’

‘Yours ever sincerely,

‘ARTHUR MAYBOLD.’

He rang the bell. ‘Tell Charles to take these copybooks and this note to the school at once.’

The maid took the parcel and the letter, and in a few minutes a boy was seen to leave the vicarage gate, with the one under his arm, and the other in his hand. The vicar sat with his hand to his brow, watch-

ing the lad as he climbed the hill and entered the little field that intervened between that spot and the school.

Here he was met by another boy, and after a salutation and pugilistic frisk had passed between the two, the second boy came on his way to the vicarage, and the other vanished out of sight.

The boy came to the door, and a note for Mr. Maybold was brought in.

He knew the writing. Opening the envelope with an unsteady hand, he read the subjoined words:

‘Dear Mr. Maybold,—I have been thinking seriously and sadly through the whole of the night of the question you put to me last evening; and of my answer. That answer, as an honest woman, I had no right to give.

‘It is my nature—perhaps all women’s

—to love refinement of mind and manners ; but even more than this, to be ever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and luxurious than those which have been customary. And you praised me, and praise is life to me. It was alone my sensations at these things which prompted my reply. Ambition and vanity they would be called ; perhaps they are so.

‘ After this explanation, I hope you will generously allow me to withdraw the answer I too hastily gave.

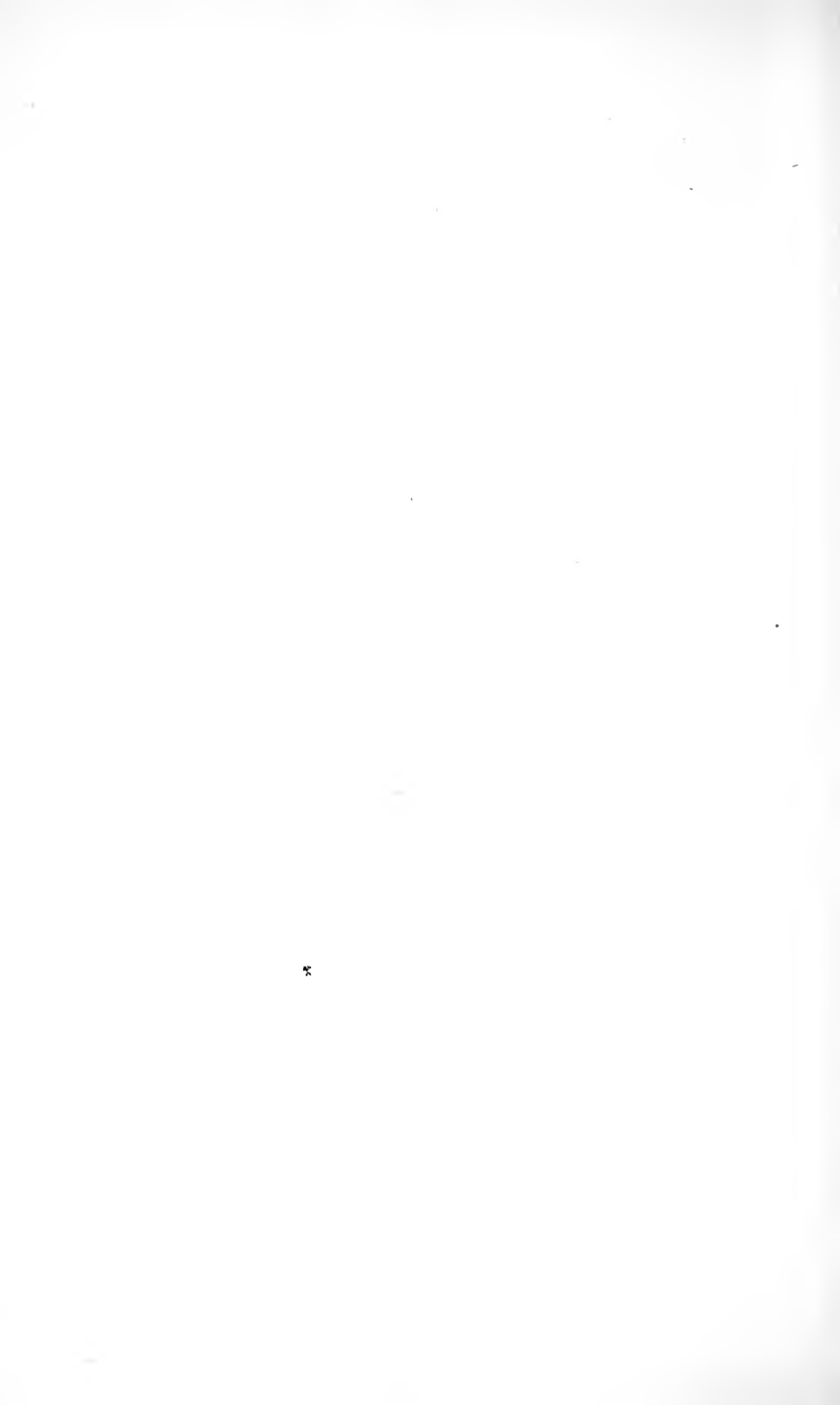
‘ And one more request. To keep the meeting of last night, and all that passed between us there, for ever a secret. Were it to become known, it would for ever blight the happiness of a trusting and generous man, whom I love still, and shall love always.

‘ Yours sincerely,

‘ FANCY DAY.’

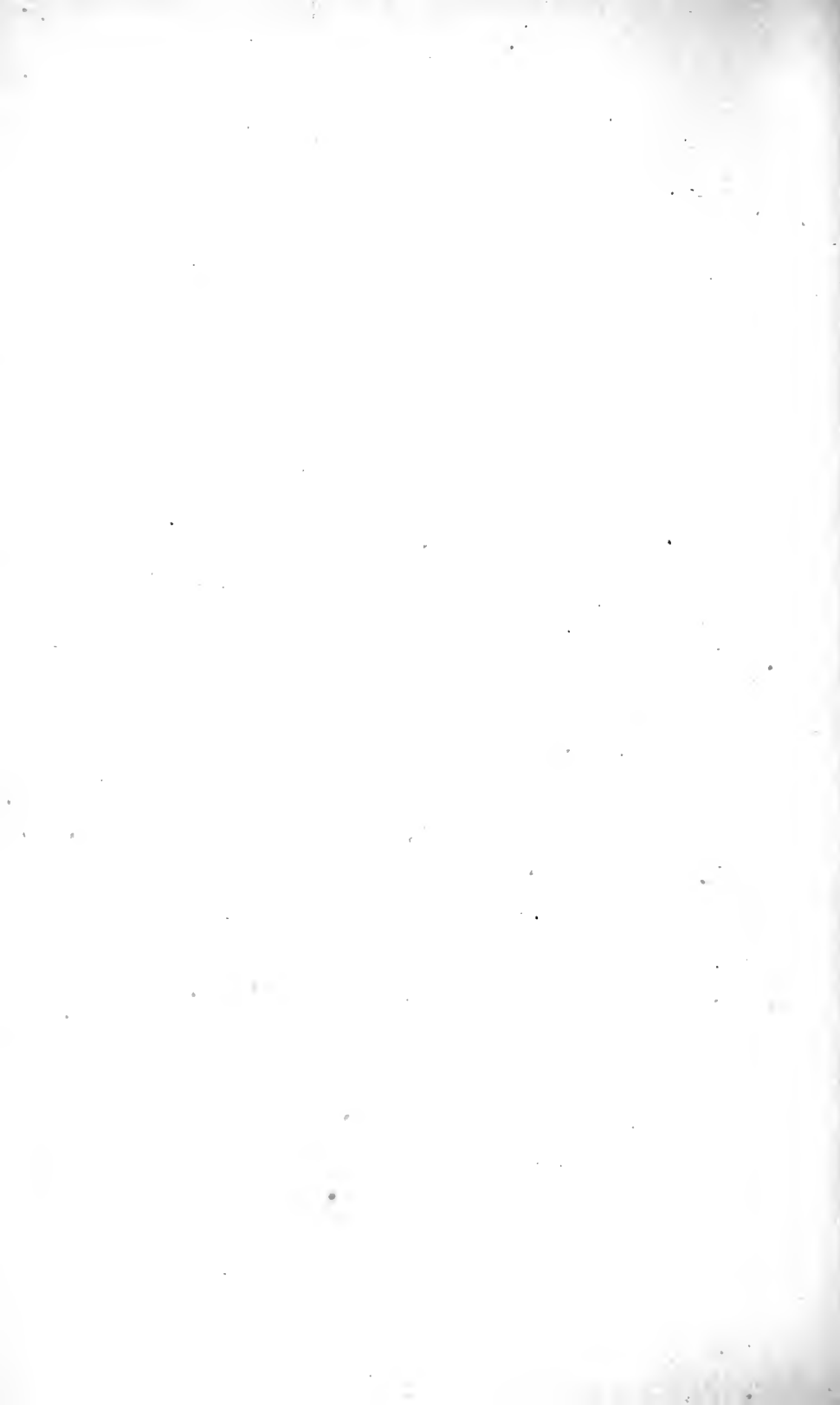
The last written communication that ever passed from the vicar to Fancy, was a note containing these words only :

‘Tell him everything; it is best. He will forgive you.’



PART V.

CONCLUSION.



CHAPTER I.

‘THE KNOT THERE’S NO UNTYING.’

THE last day of the story is dated just subsequent to that point in the development of the seasons when country people go to bed among nearly naked trees, and awake next morning among green ones; when the landscape appears embarrassed with the sudden weight and brilliancy of its leaves; when the night-jar comes and commences for the summer his tune of one note; when the apple-trees have bloomed, and the roads and orchards become spotted with fallen petals; when the faces of the delicate

flowers are darkened, and their heads weighed down by the throng of honey-bees, which increase their humming till humming is too mild a term for the all-pervading sound; and when cuckoos, blackbirds, and sparrows, that have hitherto been merry and respectful neighbours, become noisy and persistent intimates.

The exterior of Geoffrey Day's house in Yalbury Wood appeared exactly as was usual at that season, but a frantic barking of the dogs at the back told of unwonted movements somewhere within. Inside the door the eyes beheld a gathering, which was a rarity indeed for the dwelling of the solitary keeper.

About the room were sitting and standing, in various gnarled attitudes, our old acquaintance, grandfathers James and William, the tranter, Mr. Penny, two or three children, including Jimmy and Charley,

besides three or four country ladies and gentlemen who do not require any distinction by name. Geoffrey was seen and heard stamping about the outhouse and among the bushes of the garden, attending to details of daily routine before the proper time arrived for their performance, in order that they might be off his hands for the day. He appeared with his shirt-sleeves rolled up; his best new nether garments, in which he had arrayed himself that morning, being temporarily disguised under a week-day apron whilst these proceedings were in operation. He occasionally glanced at the hives in passing, to see if the bees were swarming, ultimately rolling down his shirt-sleeves and going indoors, talking to tranter Dewy whilst buttoning the wristbands, to save time; next going upstairs for his best waistcoat, and coming down again to make another remark whilst buttoning

that, during the time looking fixedly in the tranter's face, as if he were a looking-glass.

The furniture had undergone attenuation to an alarming extent, every duplicate piece having been removed, including the clock by Thomas Wood; Ezekiel Sparrowgrass being at last left sole referee in matters of time.

Fancy was stationary upstairs, receiving her layers of clothes and adornments, and answering by short fragments of laughter, which had more fidgetiness than mirth in them, remarks that were made from time to time by Mrs. Dewy and Mrs. Penny, who were assisting her at the toilet, Mrs. Day having pleaded a queerness in her head as a reason for shutting herself up in an inner bedroom for the whole morning. Mrs. Penny appeared with nine corkscrew curls on each side of her temples, and a

back comb stuck upon her crown like a castle on a steep.

The conversation just now going on was concerning the banns, the last publication of which had been on the Sunday previous.

‘And how did they sound?’ Fancy subtly inquired.

‘Very beautiful indeed,’ said Mrs. Penny. ‘I never heard any sound better.’

‘But *how*?’

‘O, *so* natural and elegant, didn’t they, Reuben!’ she cried, through the chinks of the unceiled floor, to the tranter downstairs.

‘What’s that?’ said the tranter, looking up inquiringly at the floor above him for an answer.

‘Didn’t Dick and Fancy sound well when they were called home in church last Sunday?’ came downwards again in Mrs. Penny’s voice.

‘Ay, that they did, my sonnies!—especially the first time. There was a terrible whispering piece of work in the congregation, wasn’t there, naighbour Penny?’ said the tranter, taking up the thread of conversation on his own account, and, in order to be heard in the room above, speaking very loudly to Mr. Penny, who sat at the distance of two feet from him, or rather less.

‘I never remember seeing such a whispering as there was,’ said Mr. Penny, also loudly, to the room above. ‘And such sorrowful envy on the maidens’ faces; really, I never see such envy as there was!’

Fancy’s lineaments varied in innumerable little flushes, and her heart palpitated innumerable little tremors of pleasure. ‘But perhaps,’ she said, with assumed indifference, ‘it was only because no religion was going on just then.’

‘O, no; nothing to do with that. ’Twas

because of your high standing. It was just as if they had one and all caught Dick kissing and coling ye to death, wasn't it, Mrs. Dewy?'

'Ay; that 'twas.'

'How people will talk about people!' Fancy exclaimed.

'Well, if you make songs about yourself, my dear, you can't blame other people for singing 'em.'

'Mercy me! how shall I go through it?' said the young lady again, but merely to those in the bedroom, with a breathing of a kind between a sigh and a pant, round shining eyes, and warm face.

'O, you'll get through it well enough, child,' said Mrs. Dewy placidly. 'The edge of the performance is taken off at the calling home; and when once you get up to the chancel end o' the church, you feel as saucy as you please. I'm sure I felt as

brave as a sodger all through the deed—though of course I dropped my face and looked modest, as was becoming to a maid. Mind you do that, Fancy.'

'And I walked into the church as quiet as a lamb, I'm sure,' subjoined Mrs. Penny. 'There, you see Penny is such a little small man. But certainly, I was flurried in the inside o' me. Well, thinks I, 'tis to be, and here goes! And do you do the same: say, "'Tis to be, and here goes!'"'

'Is there such a wonderful virtue in your "'Tis to be, and here goes!'"' inquired Fancy.

'Wonderful! 'Twill carry a body through it all from wedding to churching, if you only let it out with spirit enough.'

'Very well, then,' said Fancy, blushing. "'Tis to be, and here goes!'

'That's a girl for a husband!' said Mrs. Dewy.

‘I do hope he’ll come in time!’ continued the bride-elect, inventing a new cause of affright, now that the other was demolished.

‘Twould be a thousand pities if he didn’t come, now you be so brave,’ said Mrs. Penny.

Grandfather James, having overheard some of these remarks, said downstairs with mischievous loudness:

‘I’ve heard that at some weddings the men don’t come.’

‘They’ve been known not to, before now, certainly,’ said Mr. Penny, cleaning one of the glasses of his spectacles.

‘O, do hear what they’re saying downstairs,’ whispered Fancy. ‘Hush, hush!’

She listened.

‘They have, haven’t they, Geoffrey?’ continued grandfather James, as Geoffrey entered.

‘Have what?’ said Geoffrey.

‘The men have been known not to come.’

‘That they have,’ said the keeper.

‘Ay; I’ve knowed times when the wedding had to be put off through his not appearing, being tired of the woman. And another case I knowed when the man was caught in a man-trap crossing Mellstock Wood, and the three months had run out before he got well, and the banns had to be published over again.’

‘How horrible!’ said Fancy.

‘They only say it on purpose to tease you, my dear,’ said Mrs. Dewy.

‘’Tis quite sad to think what wretched shifts poor maids have been put to,’ came again from downstairs. ‘Ye should hear Clerk Wilkins, my brother-law, tell his experiences in marrying couples these last thirty years: sometimes one thing, some-

times another—'tis quite heart-rending—enough to make your hair stand on end.'

'Those things don't happen very often, I know,' said Fancy, with smouldering uneasiness.

'Well, really 'tis time Dick was here,' said the tranter.

'Don't keep on at me so, grandfather James and Mr. Dewy, and all you down there!' Fancy broke out, unable to endure any longer. 'I am sure I shall die, or do something, if you do.'

'Never you hearken to these old chaps, Miss Day!' cried Nat Callcome, the best man, who had just entered, and threw his voice upward through the chinks of the floor as the others had done. 'Tis all right; Dick's coming on like a wild feller; he'll be here in a minute. The hive o' bees his mother gie'd en for his new garden swarmed jist as he was starting, and he

said, "I can't afford to lose a stock o' bees; no, that I can't, though I fain would; and Fancy wouldn't wish it on any account." So he jist stopped to ting to 'em and shake 'em.'

'A genuine wise man,' said Geoffrey.

'To be sure, what a day's work we had yesterday!' Mr. Callcome continued, lowering his voice as if it were not necessary any longer to include those in the room above among his audience, and selecting a remote corner of his best clean handkerchief for wiping his face. 'To be sure!'

'Things so heavy, I suppose,' said Geoffrey, as if reading through the chimney-window from the far end of the paddock.

'Ay,' said Nat, looking round the room at points from which furniture had been removed. 'And so awkward to carry, too. 'Twas ath'art and across Dick's garden; in

and out Dick's door; up and down Dick's stairs; round and round Dick's chammers till legs were worn to stumps: and Dick is so particular, too. And the stores of victuals and drink that lad has laid in: why, 'tis enough for Noah's ark! I'm sure I never wish to see a choicer half-dozen of hams than he's got there in his chimley; and the cider I tasted was a very pretty drop, indeed;—never could desire a prettier tasted cider.'

'They be for the love and the stalled ox both. Ah, the greedy martels!' said grandfather James.

'Well, may-be they be. "Surely," says I, "that couple between 'em have heaped up so much furniture and victuals, that anybody would think they were going to take hold the big end of married life first, and begin wi' a grown-up family." Ah, what a bath of heat we two chaps were

in, to be sure, a-getting that furniture in order!’

‘I do so wish the room below was ceiled,’ said Fancy, as the dressing went on; ‘they can hear all we say and do up here.’

‘Hark! Who’s that?’ exclaimed a small pupil-teacher, who also assisted this morning, to her great delight. She ran half-way down the stairs, and peeped round the banister. ‘O, you should, you should, you should!’ she exclaimed, scrambling up to the room again.

‘What?’ said Fancy.

‘See the bridesmaids! They’ve just come! ’Tis wonderful, really! ’tis wonderful how muslin can be brought to it. There, they don’t look a bit like themselves, but like some very rich sisters o’ theirs that nobody knew they had!’

‘Make ’em come up to me, make ’em come up!’ cried Fancy ecstatically; and the

four damsels appointed, namely, Miss Susan Dewy, Miss Bessie Dewy, Miss Vashti Sniff, and Miss Mercy Onmey, surged upstairs, and floated along the passage.

‘I wish Dick would come!’ was again the burden of Fancy.

The same instant a small twig and flower from the creeper outside the door flew in at the open window, and a masculine voice said, ‘Ready, Fancy dearest?’

‘There he is, he is!’ cried Fancy, tittering spasmodically, and breathing as it were for the first time that morning.

The bridesmaids crowded to the window and turned their heads in the direction pointed out, at which motion eight earrings all swung as one :— not looking at Dick because they particularly wanted to see him, but with an important sense of their duty as obedient ministers of the will of that apotheosised being—the Bride.

‘He looks very taking!’ said Miss Vashti Sniff, a young lady who blushed cream-colour and wore yellow bonnet-ribbons.

Dick was advancing to the door in a painfully new coat of shining cloth, prim-rose-coloured waistcoat, hat of the same painful style of newness, and with an extra quantity of whiskers shaved off his face, and his hair cut to an unwonted shortness in honour of the occasion.

‘Now I’ll run down,’ said Fancy, looking at herself over her shoulder in the glass, and flitting off.

‘O Dick!’ she exclaimed, ‘I am so glad you are come! I knew you would, of course, but I thought, O if you shouldn’t!’

‘Not come, Fancy! Het or wet, blow or snow, here come I to-day! Why, what’s possessing your little soul? You never used to mind such things a bit.’

‘Ah, Mr. Dick, I hadn’t hoisted my

colours and committed myself then!' said Fancy.

' 'Tis a pity I can't marry the whole five of ye!' said Dick, surveying them all round.

' Heh-heh-heh!' laughed the four bridesmaids, and Fancy privately touched Dick and smoothed him down behind his shoulder, as if to assure herself that he was there in flesh and blood as her own property.

'Well, whoever would have thought such a thing?' said Dick, taking off his hat, sinking into a chair, and turning to the elder members of the company.

The elder members of the company arranged their eyes and lips to signify that in their opinion nobody could have thought such a thing, whatever it was.

'That my bees should have swarmed just then, of all times and seasons!' continued Dick, throwing a comprehensive glance like a net over the whole auditory.

‘And ’tis a fine swarm, too: I haven’t seen such a fine swarm for these ten years.’

‘An excellent sign,’ said Mrs. Penny, from the depths of experience. ‘An excellent sign.’

‘I am glad everything seems so right,’ said Fancy with a breath of relief.

‘And so am I,’ said the four bridesmaids with much sympathy.

‘Well, bees can’t be put off,’ observed grandfather James. ‘Marrying a woman is a thing you can do at any moment; but a swarm of bees won’t come for the asking.’

Dick fanned himself with his hat. ‘I can’t think,’ he said thoughtfully, ‘whatever ’twas I did to offend Mr. Maybold,—a man I like so much too. He rather took to me when he came first, and used to say he should like to see me married, and that he’d marry me, whether the young woman I chose lived in his parish or no. I slightly

reminded him of it when I put in the banns, but he didn't seem to take kindly to the notion now, and so I said no more. I wonder how it was.'

'I wonder,' said Fancy, looking into vacancy with those beautiful eyes of hers—too refined and beautiful for a tranter's wife; but, perhaps, not too good.

'Altered his mind, as folk will, I suppose,' said the tranter. 'Well, my sonnies, there'll be a good strong party looking at us to-day as we go along.'

'And the body of the church,' said Geoffrey, 'will be lined with feymells, and a row of young fellers' heads, as far down as the eyes, will be noticed just above the sills of the chancel-winders.'

'Ay, you've been through it twice,' said Reuben, 'and well may know.'

'I can put up with it for once,' said Dick, 'or twice either, or a dozen times.'

‘O Dick!’ said Fancy reproachfully.

‘Why, dear, that’s nothing,—only just a bit of a flourish. You are as nervous as a cat to-day.’

‘And then, of course, when ’tis all over,’ continued the tranter, ‘we shall march two and two round the parish.’

‘Yes, sure,’ said Mr. Penny: ‘two and two: every man hitched up to his woman, ’a b’lieve.’

‘I never can make a show of myself in that way!’ said Fancy, looking at Dick to ascertain if he could.

‘I’m agreed to anything you and the company likes, my dear!’ said Mr. Richard Dewy heartily.

‘Why, we did when we were married, didn’t we, Ann?’ said the tranter; ‘and so do everybody, my sonnies.’

‘And so did we,’ said Fancy’s father.

‘And so did Penny and I,’ said Mrs.

Penny: 'I wore my best Bath clogs, I remember, and Penny was cross because it made me look so tall.'

'And so did father and mother,' said Miss Mercy Onmey.

'And I mane to, come next Christmas!' said Nat the bridesman vigorously, and looking towards the person of Miss Vashti Sniff.

'Respectable people don't nowadays,' said Fancy. 'Still, since poor mother did, I will.'

'Ay,' resumed the tranter, "'twas on a White Tuesday when I committed it. Mellstock Club walked the same day, and we new-married folk went a-gaying round the parish behind 'em. Everybody used to wear summat white at Whitsuntide in them days. My sonnies, I've got they very white trousers that I wore, at home in box now. Ha'n't I, Ann?'

‘You had till I cut ’em up for Jimmy,’ said Mrs. Dewy.

‘And we ought, by rights, to go round Galligar-lane, by Quenton’s,’ said Mr. Penny, recovering scent of the matter in hand. ‘Dairyman Quenton is a very respectable man, and so is Farmer Crocker, and we ought to show ourselves to them.’

‘True,’ said the tranter, ‘we ought to go round Galligar-lane to do the thing well. We shall form a very striking object walking along: good-now, neighbours?’

‘That we shall: a proper pretty sight for the nation,’ said Mrs. Penny.

‘Hullo!’ said the tranter, suddenly catching sight of a singular human figure standing in the doorway, and wearing a long smock-frock of pillow-case cut and of snowy whiteness. ‘Why, Leaf! whatever dost thou do here?’

‘I’ve come to know if so be I can come

to the wedding—hee-hee!’ said Leaf in an uneasy voice of timidity.

‘Now, Leaf,’ said the tranter reproachfully, ‘you know we don’t want ye here to-day: we’ve got no room for ye, Leaf.’

‘Thomas Leaf, Thomas Leaf, fie upon ye for prying!’ said old William.

‘I know I’ve got no head, but I thought, if I washed and put on a clane shirt and smock-frock, I might just call,’ said Leaf, turning away disappointed and trembling.

‘Pore feller!’ said the tranter, turning to Geoffrey. ‘Suppose we must let en come? His looks is rather against en, and ’a is terrible silly; but ’a have never been in jail, and ’a won’t do no harm.’

Leaf looked with gratitude at the tranter for these praises, and then anxiously at Geoffrey, to see what effect they would have in helping his cause.

‘Ay, let en come,’ said Geoffrey deci-

sively. 'Leaf, th'rt welcome, 'st know;' and Leaf accordingly remained.

They were now all ready for leaving the house, and began to form a procession in the following order: Fancy and her father, Dick and Susan Dewy, Nat Callcome and Vashti Sniff, Ted Waywood and Mercy Onmey, and Jimmy and Bessy Dewy. These formed the executive, and all appeared in strict wedding attire. Then came the tranter and Mrs. Dewy, and last of all, Mr. and Mrs. Penny;—the tranter conspicuous by his enormous gloves, size eleven and three-quarters, which appeared at a distance like boxing gloves bleached, and sat rather awkwardly upon his brown hands; this hall-mark of respectability having been set upon himself to-day (by Fancy's special request) for the first time in his life.

'The proper way is for the bridesmaids to walk together,' suggested Fancy.

‘What? ’Twas always young man and young woman, arm in crook, in my time!’ said Geoffrey, astounded.

‘And in mine!’ said the tranter.

‘And in ours!’ said Mr. and Mrs. Penny.

‘Never heard o’ such a thing as woman and woman!’ said old William; who, with grandfather James and Mrs. Day, was to stay at home.

‘Whichever way you and the company likes, my dear!’ said Dick, who being on the point of securing his right to Fancy, seemed willing to renounce all other rights in the world with the greatest pleasure. The decision was left to Fancy.

‘Well, I think I’d rather have it the way mother had it,’ she said, and the couples moved along under the trees, every man to his maid.

‘Ah!’ said grandfather James to grandfather William, as they retired, ‘I wonder

which she thinks most about, Dick or her wedding raiment!

‘Well, ’tis their nater,’ said grandfather William. ‘Remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?”’

Now among dark perpendicular firs, like the shafted columns of a cathedral; now under broad beeches in bright young leaves, they threaded their way: then through a hazel copse, matted with primroses and wild hyacinths, into the high road, which dipped at that point directly into the village of Yalbury; and in the space of a quarter of an hour, Fancy found herself to be Mrs. Richard Dewy, though, much to her surprise, feeling no other than Fancy Day still.

On the circuitous return walk through the lanes and fields, amid much chattering and laughter, especially when they came to

stiles, Dick discerned a brown spot far up a turnip field.

‘Why, ’tis Enoch!’ he said to Fancy. ‘I thought I missed him at the house this morning. How is it he’s left you?’

‘He drank too much cider, and it got into his head, and they put him in the stocks for it. Father was obliged to get somebody else for a day or two, and Enoch hasn’t had anything to do with the woods since.’

‘We might ask him to call down to-night. Stocks are nothing for once, considering ’tis our wedding-day.’ The bridal party was ordered to halt.

‘Eno-o-o-o-ch!’ cried Dick at the top of his voice.

‘Y-a-a-a-a-a-as!’ said Enoch from the distance.

‘D’ye know who I be-e-e-e-e?’

‘No-o-o-o-o-o-o!’

‘ Dick Dew-w-w-w-wy!’

‘ O-h-h-h-h-h!’

‘ Just a-ma-a-a-a-a-arried!’

‘ O-h-h-h-h-h!’

‘ This is my wife, Fa-a-a-a-a-ancy!’ (holding her up to Enoch’s view as if she had been a nosegay.)

‘ O-h-h-h-h-h!’

‘ Will ye come down to the party to-ni-i-i-i-i-ight!’

‘ Ca-a-a-a-a-ant!’

‘ Why n-o-o-o-o-ot?’

‘ Don’t work for the family no-o-o-o-ow!’

‘ Not nice of Master Enoch,’ said Dick, as they resumed their walk.

‘ You mustn’t blame en,’ said Geoffrey; ‘ the man’s not himself now; he’s in his morning frame of mind. When he’s had a gallon o’ cider or ale, and a pint or two of mead, the man’s well enough, and his manners be as good as anybody’s in the kingdom.’

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.

THE point in Yalbury Wood which abutted on the end of Geoffrey Day's premises was closed with an ancient beech-tree, horizontally of enormous extent, though having no great pretensions to height. Many hundreds of birds had been born amidst the boughs of this single tree; tribes of rabbits and hares had nibbled at its bark from year to year; quaint tufts of fungi had sprung from the cavities of its forks; and countless families of moles and earthworms had crept about its roots. Beneath its shade spread a

carefully-tended grass-plot, its purpose being to supply a healthy exercise-ground for young chicken and pheasants; the hens, their mothers, being enclosed in coops placed upon the same green flooring.

All these encumbrances were now removed, and as the afternoon advanced, the guests gathered on the spot, where music, dancing, and the singing of songs went forward with great spirit throughout the evening. The propriety of every one was intense, by reason of the influence of Fancy, who, as an additional precaution in this direction, had strictly charged her father and the tranter to carefully avoid saying 'thee' and 'thou' in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of decent taste; also that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking,—a local English cus-

tom of extraordinary antiquity, but stated by Fancy to be decidedly dying out among the upper classes of society.

In addition to the local musicians present, a man who had a thorough knowledge of the tambourine was invited from the village of Tantrum Clangley,—a place long celebrated for the skill of its inhabitants as performers on instruments of percussion. These important members of the assembly were relegated to a height of two or three feet from the ground, upon a temporary erection of planks supported by barrels. Whilst the dancing progressed, the older persons sat in a group under the trunk of the beech,—the space being allotted to them somewhat grudgingly by the young ones, who were greedy of pirouetting room,—and fortified by a table against the heels of the dancers. Here the gaffers and gammers, whose dancing days were over, told stories

of great impressiveness, and at intervals surveyed the advancing and retiring couples from the same retreat, as people on shore might be supposed to survey a naval engagement in the bay beyond; returning again to their tales when the pause was over. Those of the whirling throng, who, during the rests between each figure, turned their eyes in the direction of these seated ones, were only able to discover, on account of the music and bustle, that a very striking circumstance was in course of narration—denoted by an emphatic sweep of the hand, snapping of the fingers, close of the lips, and fixed look into the centre of the listener's eye for the space of a quarter of a minute, which raised in that listener such a reciprocating working of face as to sometimes make the distant dancers half wish to know what such an interesting tale could refer to.

Fancy caused her looks to wear as much matronly expression as was obtainable out of six hours' experience as a wife, in order that the contrast between her own state of life and that of the unmarried young women present might be duly impressed upon the company: occasionally stealing glances of admiration at her left hand, but this quite privately; for her ostensible bearing concerning the matter was intended to show that, though she undoubtedly occupied the most wondrous position in the eyes of the world that had ever been attained, she was almost unconscious of the circumstance, and that the somewhat prominent position in which that wonderfully - emblazoned left hand was continually found to be placed, when handing cups and saucers, knives, forks, and glasses, was quite the result of accident. As to wishing to excite envy in the bosoms of her maiden companions, by the ex-

hibition of the shining ring, every one was to know it was quite foreign to the dignity of such an experienced married woman. Dick's imagination in the mean time was far less capable of drawing so much wontedness from his new condition. He had been for two or three hours trying to feel himself merely a newly-married man, but had been able to get no farther in the attempt than to realise that he was Dick Dewy, the tranter's son, at a party at the keeper's, dancing and chatting with Fancy Day.

Five country dances, including 'Haste to the Wedding,' two reels, and three fragments of hornpipes, brought them to the time for supper, which, on account of the dampness of the grass from the immaturity of the summer season, was spread indoors. At the conclusion of the meal, Dick went out to put the horse in; and Fancy, with the elder half of the four bridesmaids, re-

tired upstairs to dress for the journey to Dick's new cottage near Mellstock.

'How long will you be putting on your bonnet, Fancy?' Dick inquired at the foot of the staircase. Being now a man of business and married, he was strong on the importance of time, and doubled the emphasis of his words in conversing, and added vigour to his nods.

'Only a minute.'

'How long is that?'

'Well, dear, five.'

'Ah, sonnies!' said the tranter, as Dick retired, 'tis a talent of the female race that low numbers should stand for high, more especially in matters of waiting, matters of age, and matters of money.'

'True, true, upon my body,' said Geoffrey.

'Ye spak with feeling, Geoffrey, seemingly.'

‘Anybody that d’know my experience might guess that.’

‘What’s she doing now, Geoffrey?’

‘Claning out all the upstairs drawers and cupboards, and dusting the second-best chainey—a thing that’s only done once a year. “If there’s work to be done, I must do it,” says she, “wedding or no.”’

‘’Tis my belief she’s a very good woman at bottom.’

‘She’s terrible deep, then.’

Mrs. Penny turned round. ‘Well, ’tis humps and hollers with the best of us; but still and for all that, Dick and Fancy stand as fair a chance of having a bit of sunsheen as any married pair in the land.’

‘Ay, there’s no gainsaying it.’

Mrs. Dewy came up, talking to one person and looking at another. ‘Happy, yes,’

she said. 'Tis always so when a couple is so exactly in tune with one another as Dick and she.'

'When they be'n't too poor to have time to sing,' said grandfather James.

'I tell ye, naibours, when the pinch comes,' said the tranter: 'when the oldest daughter's boots be only a size less than her mother's, and the rest o' the flock close behind her. A sharp time for a man that, my sonnies; a very sharp time! Chanticleer's comb is a-cut then, 'a b'lieve.'

'That's about the form o't,' said Mr. Penny. 'That'll put the stuns upon a man, when you must measure mother and daughter's lasts to tell 'em apart.'

'You've no cause to complain, Reuben, of such a close-coming flock,' said Mrs. Dewy; 'for ours was a straggling lot enough, God knows.'

'I d'know it, I d'know it,' said the

tranter. 'You be a well-enough woman, Ann.'

Mrs. Dewy put her mouth in the form of a smile, and put it back again without smiling.

'And if they come together, they go together,' said Mrs. Penny, whose family was the reverse of the tranter's; 'and a little money will make either fate tolerable. And money can be made by our young couple, I know.'

'Yes, that it can!' said the impulsive voice of Leaf, who had hitherto humbly admired the proceedings from a corner. 'It can be done—all that's wanted is a few pounds to begin with. That's all! I know a story about it!'

'Let's hear thy story, Leaf,' said the tranter. 'I never knowed you were clever enough to tell a story. Silence, all of ye! Mr. Leaf will tell a story.'

‘Tell your story, Thomas Leaf,’ said grandfather William in the tone of a schoolmaster.

‘Once,’ said the delighted Leaf, in an uncertain voice, ‘there was a man who lived in a house! Well, this man went thinking and thinking night and day. At last he said to himself, as I might, “If I had only ten pound, I’d make a fortune. At last, by hook or by crook, behold he got the ten pounds!’

‘Only think of that!’ said Nat Callcome satirically.

‘Silence!’ said the tranter.

‘Well, now comes the interesting part of the story! In a little time he made that ten pounds twenty. Then a little time after that he doubled it, and made it forty. Well, he went on, and a good while after that he made it eighty, and on to a hundred. Well, by and by he made it two hundred! Well,

you'd never believe it, but—he went on and made it four hundred! He went on, and what did he do? Why, he made it eight hundred! Yes, he did,' continued Leaf, in the highest pitch of excitement, bringing down his fist upon his knee with such force that he quivered with the pain; 'yes, and he went on and made it A THOUSAND!'

'Hear, hear!' said the tranter. 'Better than the history of England, my sonnies!'

'Thank you for your story, Thomas Leaf,' said grandfather William; and then Leaf gradually sank into nothingness again.

Amid a medley of laughter, old shoes, and elder-wine, Dick and his bride took their departure, side by side in the excellent new spring-cart which the young tranter now possessed. The moon was just over the full, rendering any light from lamps or their own beauties quite unnecessary to the

pair. They drove slowly along Wilderness Bottom, where the lane passed between two copses. Dick was talking to his companion.

‘Fancy,’ he said, ‘why we are so happy is because there is such entire confidence between us. Ever since that time you confessed to that little flirtation with Shinar by the river (which was really no flirtation at all), I have thought how artless and good you must be to tell me of such a trifling thing, and to be so frightened about it as you were. It has won me to tell you my every movement since then. We’ll have no secrets from each other, darling, will we ever?—no secret at all.’

‘None from to-day,’ said Fancy. ‘Hark! what’s that?’

From a neighbouring thicket was suddenly heard to issue in a loud, musical, and liquid voice,

‘Tippiwit! swe-e-et! ki-ki-ki! Come hither, come hither, come hither!’

‘O, ’tis the nightingale,’ murmured she, and thought of a secret she should never tell.

THE END.

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